

TECHNOLOGY TOWARDS TRANSCENDENCE  
APOCALYPTIC SPIRITUALITIES & THE GENESIS OF SCIENCE  
FICTION IN WEIMAR GERMANY

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of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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by  
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

TECHNOLOGY TOWARDS TRANSCENDENCE:  
APOCALYPTIC SPIRITUALITIES & THE GENESIS OF SCIENCE FICTION IN  
WEIMAR GERMANY

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....   | <b>ii</b>  |
| <br>  |            |
| INTRODUCTION: AMBIGUOUS DEMARCATIONS .....                              | iii        |
| Brief Overview of Content & Argument.....                               | iv         |
| Methodology & Shortcomings .....  | viii       |
| Outline of Chapters .....   | xvi        |
| <br>  |            |
| CHAPTER ONE: THE INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY OF GNOSTICISM .....              | <b>1</b>   |
| SECULAR UNIVERSITIES & THE HUMAN SCIENCES.....                          | 3          |
| The Christ Myth.....  | 6          |
| The “Conflict between Babel & the Bible” .....                          | 11         |
| The Turfan Expeditions .....  | 15         |
| The New Perspective .....   | 20         |
| ESOTERIC SCHOOLS & THE “SPIRITUAL SCIENCES”.....                        | 24         |
| Ordo Templi Orientis .....  | 27         |
| The Anthroposophical Society.....                                       | 34         |
| THE APPLICABILITY OF GNOSTICISM IN MODERNITY .....                      | 43         |
| <br>  |            |
| CHAPTER TWO: THE RECURRENCE OF THE PAST .....                           | <b>57</b>  |
| THE FANTASTIC AS SCIENTIFIC FACT .....                                  | 60         |
| Thresholds into the Transcendental .....                                | 61         |
| Naturalizing the Supernatural, Supernaturalizing the Natural .....      | 72         |
| THE FANTASTIC AS MYSTICAL EXPRESSION.....                               | 82         |
| Illumination of the Page.....   | 83         |
| Illumination of the Screen.....   | 94         |
| THE LIMITLESSNESS OF REALITY .....                                      | 105        |
| <br>  |            |
| CHAPTER THREE: REVELATIONS OF KNOWLEDGE .....                           | <b>116</b> |
| QUESTIONS OF IDENTITY .....   | 120        |
| Withdrawing from the World.....   | 121        |
| From Belief to Knowledge.....   | 131        |
| “THE LIGHT BRINGER” .....   | 144        |
| Out of the Past.....  | 146        |
| Into the Future.....  | 155        |
| INNER SPARK .....   | 174        |
| <br>  |            |
| CHAPTER FOUR: GNOSTIC FORCES IN THE ABSURDITY OF POSTWAR MODERNISM..... | <b>188</b> |
| FORCES OF DARKNESS.....   | 191        |
| The Demiurge & the Archons.....   | 193        |
| Technocratic Transliterations.....                                      | 202        |
| FORCES OF LIGHT .....   | 214        |
| The Two Sophias & the Christos .....                                    | 216        |
| Fantasies of Redemption.....  | 233        |
| MICROCOSM, MACROCOSM.....   | 246        |
| As Above, So Below .....  | 248        |

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| As Within, So Without.....                            | 255        |
| <b>CHAPTER FIVE: ASCENT THROUGH THE HEAVENS .....</b> | <b>262</b> |
| THE GOSPEL IN THE SKY .....                           | 266        |
| Solar Wisdom of Biblical Myth.....                    | 267        |
| Esoteric Astrology .....                              | 273        |
| ASTRAL MYTHS OF THE FUTURE .....                      | 280        |
| From Alpha to Omega .....                             | 282        |
| Heuristic Optics .....                                | 286        |
| SIGNS IN THE SKY ABOVE METROPOLIS.....                | 292        |
| Prelude .....   | 292        |
| Cycle 1: Aries .....                                  | 294        |
| Cycle 2: Taurus .....                                 | 300        |
| Cycle 3: Gemini .....                                 | 309        |
| Cycle 4: Cancer.....                                  | 320        |
| THE PRIMACY OF ALLEGORY .....                         | 328        |
| <b>CONCLUSION: LAST THINGS .....</b>                  | <b>339</b> |
| <b>BIBLIOGRAPHY &amp; FILMOGRAPHY .....</b>           | <b>346</b> |

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

|  |                |
|--|----------------|
| <b>CHAPTER TWO .....</b>   | <b>57-112</b>  |
| Fig. 2.1: <i>Wunder der Schöpfung</i> , Pyramid .....                                | 113            |
| Fig. 2.2: <i>Wunder der Schöpfung</i> , Spaceship launch.....                        | 113            |
| Fig. 2.3: <i>Metropolis</i> , Astrologer-Priests.....                                | 113            |
| Fig. 2.4: <i>Metropolis</i> , Tower of Babel destroyed .....                         | 113            |
| Fig. 2.5: <i>Lemuria</i> , Book Cover .....  | 114            |
| Fig. 2.6: Albin Grau's film poster for <i>Nosferatu</i> .....                        | 114            |
| Fig. 2.7: <i>Saturn-Gnosis</i> , Albin Grau's artwork .....                          | 114            |
| Fig. 2.8: Werner Graul's film poster for <i>Metropolis</i> .....                     | 114            |
| Fig. 2.9: Werner Graul's illustration for <i>Moses Entlarvt</i> .....                | 115            |
| Fig. 2.10: Publicity photo of Fritz Lang and Thea von Harbou at their apartment..... | 115            |
| <b>CHAPTER THREE .....</b>   | <b>116-183</b> |
| Fig. 3.1: <i>Algol</i> , Robert's horror at the “Algol Machine”.....                 | 184            |
| Fig. 3.2: <i>Algol</i> , Robert's mastery of Algol technology .....                  | 184            |
| Fig. 3.3: <i>Wunder der Schöpfung</i> , the Einstein Tower .....                     | 184            |
| Fig. 3.4: <i>Wunder der Schöpfung</i> , the Primal Man.....                          | 184            |
| Fig. 3.5: <i>Metropolis</i> , the M-Machine transforms into Moloch .....             | 185            |
| Fig. 3.6: The diagram of Schrenck-Notzing's detector .....                           | 185            |
| Fig. 3.7: Ejner Nielsen before a mediumistic recording instrument .....              | 185            |
| Fig. 3.8: <i>Der müde Tod</i> , the girl as Gnostic soul-flame .....                 | 185            |
| Fig. 3.9: <i>Schatten</i> , the Shadow Player and the Woman Servant .....            | 186            |
| Fig. 3.10: <i>Die Nibelungen</i> , Siegfried and Alberich in the cave .....          | 186            |
| Fig. 3.11: <i>Faust</i> , Faust, Mephisto, and the vision .....                      | 186            |
| Fig. 3.12: <i>Metropolis</i> , Rotwang's laboratory .....                            | 186            |
| Fig. 3.13: <i>Algol</i> , a factory machine transforms into Algol.....               | 187            |
| Fig. 3.14: <i>Metropolis</i> , Rotwang's “rape” of Maria .....                       | 187            |
| Fig. 3.15: <i>Algol</i> , the euphoria after the coup .....                          | 187            |
| Fig. 3.16: <i>Metropolis</i> , Yoshiwara after the city's blackout.....              | 187            |
| <b>CHAPTER FOUR .....</b>  | <b>188-259</b> |
| Fig. 4.1: <i>Algol</i> , Herne overlooking his city .....                            | 260            |
| Fig. 4.2: <i>Metropolis</i> , Fredersen overlooking his city .....                   | 260            |
| Fig. 4.3: <i>Metropolis</i> , Fredersen with compass .....                           | 260            |
| Fig. 4.4: <i>Algol</i> , Robert with the key to the “Hall of Eternal Power”.....     | 260            |
| Fig. 4.5: <i>Algol</i> , Robert, Leonora, and the prototype.....                     | 261            |
| Fig. 4.6: <i>Metropolis</i> , Maria at the gong.....                                 | 261            |
| <b>CHAPTER FIVE .....</b>  | <b>262-329</b> |
| Dia. 5.1: Erbt's zodiacal layout of the Gospel of Mark .....                         | 330            |
| Dia. 5.2: The Zodiacal Schema in Three Weimar Films.....                             | 331-333        |
| Fig. 5.1: Niemojewski's illustration of Atlas .....                                  | 334            |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Fig. 5.2: Poster for Metropolis, evoking Atlas .....                                      | 334 |
| Fig. 5.3: <i>Die Nibelungen</i> , the church as the glyph of Libra .....                  | 334 |
| Fig. 5.4: <i>Die Nibelungen</i> , Siegfried the glyph of Sagittarius .....                | 334 |
| Fig. 5.5: <i>Metropolis</i> , Rotwang as the glyph of Cancer .....                        | 335 |
| Fig. 5.6: <i>Metropolis</i> , Maria as the sign of Virgo .....                            | 335 |
| Fig. 5.7: Niemojewski's illustration of St. Andrew as Cancer .....                        | 335 |
| Fig. 5.8: Niemojewski's illustration of the Madonna in the <i>vesica pisces</i> .....     | 335 |
| Fig. 5.9: <i>Metropolis</i> , Freder's flight through the city as Bellerophon .....       | 336 |
| Fig. 5.10: Film poster for <i>Die Nibelungen</i> .....                                    | 336 |
| Fig. 5.11: <i>Metropolis</i> , the courtesan as the glyph of Aires .....                  | 336 |
| Fig. 5.12: <i>Metropolis</i> , the Fountain as the sign of Aries .....                    | 336 |
| Fig. 5.13: <i>Metropolis</i> , the New Tower of Babel as the glyph of Taurus .....        | 337 |
| Fig. 5.14: <i>Metropolis</i> , Fredersen as Orion .....                                   | 337 |
| Fig. 5.15: <i>Metropolis</i> , the Pater-Noster Machine as the glyph of Gemini .....      | 337 |
| Fig. 5.16: <i>Metropolis</i> , Freder and Georgi as Castor and Pollux .....               | 337 |
| Fig. 5.17: <i>Metropolis</i> , Hel as the Elder Sophia .....                              | 338 |
| Fig. 5.18: <i>Metropolis</i> , the Machine-Man as the perversion of Sophia's wisdom ..... | 338 |

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY OF GNOSTICISM

The intrigue which Hans Werckmeister, Hans Brennert, Frieda Köhne, Hans Walter Kornblum, Fritz Lang, Thea von Harbou, and especially Henrik Galeen, exhibited in the ancient Orient, the occult, and especially Gnosticism is most evident in their personal lives, filmographies, and publications that appeared during their fulltime careers as filmmakers during the Weimar Republic. While to what extent each filmmaker was personally engaged in esotericism exceeds the scope of this study, they would have certainly become familiar with these heterodox spiritualities through the intellectual and cultural hype surrounding Gnosticism in the decade before the Great War. Given their educated upbringings in the cosmopolitan centers of Germany and Austria-Hungary, there is no doubt that they had known about the controversies between 1900 and 1918 surrounding the excavations in the Orient by archaeologists, the investigation of Gnostic texts by philologists, and, most of all, the unexpected uproar that these discoveries incurred as scholars and mystics utilized these fresh sources to undermine everything assumed about the spiritual heritage of the modern West.

So profound was their knowledge that, by the Weimar era, these filmmakers must have pulled from a wide variety of sources for their inspiration. Apparently, many of these sources were a product of the modern occult movement. Treatises, lectures, and other publications on ancient wisdom were easily accessible throughout the first third of the twentieth century, and it is certainly inconceivable that as bourgeois citizens they could have ignored the myriad of Theosophical, Rosicrucian, and other occult that pervaded the upper echelons of European society during the years before the Great War. Less obviously, however, these sources included scholarly publications relating the

newest discoveries about the spiritual mysteries of ancient civilizations, especially in the Orient. While pinpointing the exact sources from which these filmmakers is a near-impossible task, it is reasonable to assert that the controversial ideas within the cultural milieu of prewar Europe may be traced, both explicitly and implicitly, to the narratives and themes of *Algol: Eine Tragödie der Macht*, *Wunder der Schöpfung*, *Metropolis*, *Alraune*, and *Frau im Mond*.

Born between 1870 and 1890, none of them were over 30 by the turn of the twentieth century, and these heterodox ideas would have certainly fascinated the impressionable minds of these young people. This is because, between 1900 and 1918, avant-garde mystics, clairvoyants, and occultists on the one hand and cutting-edge philologists, archaeologists, and historians on the other, busied themselves in bursting asunder treasured presumptions that Europeans had always held about the ancient world and its heritage in the modern West.<sup>1</sup> However, the key moments that most rocked the worldview of scholars and lay people, Germans, Europeans, and Americans alike, occurred within the first years of the twentieth century. Because each of these moments split further an ideological controversy where the intellectual and cultural clashed in an indistinguishable mishmash, an investigation of these events is necessary before demonstrating the likelihood that Galeen, Werckmeister, Köhne, Brennert, Kornblum, Lang, and von Harbou were aware of their heterodox spiritualities when creating their films, and that they understood the agenda behind these movements threatened the way Europeans had come to perceive themselves collectively as the world leader in scientific

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<sup>1</sup> This is also the thesis, albeit with a focus on German philologists, as stated in Suzanne Marchand, “German Orientalism and the Decline of the West,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 145, 4 (Dec. 2001): 465. For a more eloquent elucidation on this argument with a particular focus on German biblical scholars, see “Chapter Four: The History of Religions School” in Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003): 71-109.

progress and a wellspring of spiritual hegemony.

#### SECULAR UNIVERSITIES & THE HUMAN SCIENCES

On top of the cultural upheaval that all the publicity caused, the ensuing commotion unleashed a flood of ancient historians, philologists, and theologians who joined either side of the conflict. But the escalating tension would be burst asunder by the nationalism, toil, and carnage that persisted throughout the Great War, only to resurface in the next decade to elicit little more than indifference from a German public coping with military defeat, national division, new governmental development, and socioeconomic distress.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, controversies such as the Christ Myth, the Babel-Bible conflict, and the Turfan expeditions had a profound impact on German culture.

None of this changing tide in scholarly (or public) opinion can be explained without the broader context of Germany's intellectual and cultural milieu during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, viz. an obsession with the ancient Orient. Progressing from the founding to the destruction of the German Empire, this obsession was ironic and paradoxical. While during the 1870s it had served to stir nationalism,<sup>3</sup> by the end of the Great War this cultural obsession with the Orient led numerous Germans to call into question Christianity and classical antiquity, modernity's dearest models for identity and morality, as universal norms. While in some ways the popularity of the ancient Orient appealed to laymen and scholars in kindling a new sense of identity and morality, its upheaval hardly functioned exclusively to perpetuate Eurocentric views.

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<sup>2</sup> For this observation, see Arthur Drews, *Das Markusevangelium als Zeugnis Gegen die Geschichtlichkeit Jesu* (Jena: Eugen Dietrichs Verlag, 1921): 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> It seems unlikely that a rising interest in the Orient alone precipitated this destruction of Western self-satisfaction and the cultural shift toward alternative modes of individual expression modernity. For example, natural-scientific thought and radical Germanophilia also contributed heavily to the demise of ancient models for spiritual and moral standards. Marchand 465-466.

Quite the contrary was the case. As scholars scrambled to make sense of new archaeological and anthropological discoveries from ancient civilizations like Persia and Babylon, the fresh evidence helped to undermine Western self-satisfaction.<sup>4</sup>

At the heart of this transition from east to west is *Orientalistik*, or orientalism—the study of the Orient. Since before the founding of the German Empire in 1871 until the end of the Weimar Republic in 1933, German philologists were considered the foremost experts in the “orientalist” school. Educated in Sanskrit, Sumerian, and other safely dead languages, these scholars rose to national acclaim in their examination of ancient texts from Germany’s first archaeological expeditions to India, Persia, and Mesopotamia.<sup>5</sup> Considering the rich heritage of Latin and Greek philology within their universities during the early nineteenth century, German scholars interested in the less-popular oriental languages sought to overcome classicism’s hegemonic institutional role as well as the nation’s lack of colonial presence in the East by applying their expertise in deciphering the latest archaeological discoveries from the East.<sup>6</sup>

In many ways, the orientalists had an intellectual advantage over the classicists, who studied the more popular Greco-Roman civilizations and the formative centuries of the Christian West. Because university curriculum required students to learn Latin and Greek but not languages of the East, orientalists became armed with an astute knowledge of biblical languages and early Christian texts that allowed them to judge the cultures of

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<sup>4</sup> Marchand claims that these two factors of disillusionment may be extended to all Europe at the time. But while she asserts emphatically that “German orientalism helped *destroy*” Western self-perception in intellectual and cultural circles, she is careful to add that this European-wide phenomenon did not obliterate Eurocentric historicism by the 1920s (*Ibid.* 465-466).

<sup>5</sup> Marchand notes that it is philology that gave scholars access to the revered cultures of antiquity (465).

<sup>6</sup> Marchand 466-467.

the ancient Orient from a near-contemporary Western perspective.<sup>7</sup> By comparing newfound texts from eastern religious traditions, orientalists well into the 1920s marveled at the striking similarities in mythological traditions between East and West—not just in terms of narrative, but linguistic nuances as well. This endeavor had been crudely attempted by seventeenth-century Enlightenment skeptics like Constantin François Volney, Charles-François Dupuis, and Hermann Samuel Reimarus, but contemporaries branded their research in comparative religions as little more than shoddy intellectualism. However, much to the joy of orientalists, it seemed that the nineteenth-century science of philology and fresh archaeological discoveries had proven these critics wrong. There were in fact exceedingly profound connections between, for example, second-century Christianity and Buddhism in India five hundred years earlier.<sup>8</sup> By applying recent sources to specialized method, these scholars attempted to wipe away all doubt that the Orient imposed significant influence on the classical West.

The most radical criticisms made by German orientalists used philological expertise to demolish the historical testimony of the whole Bible. Their work, scandalous at first, was rapidly adopted as scholarly orthodoxy and held that position from 1880 to 1914.<sup>9</sup> Influential as both Old Testament scholars and as Arabists, the diehard German-trained orientalists Ernest Renan and Julius Wellhausen enjoyed a change in reputation in a two-decade span, going from fringe theorists to insightful pioneers who opened the way for

<sup>7</sup> Wilhelm von Humboldt's 1810 educational reform was responsible for bringing philology into the standard curriculum at German universities, making it possible, even fashionable, for a student to become a career classicist. Whereas British and French orientalists made their careers as officials and travelers, German orientalists took academic positions. This scholarly interest in the Orient came into vogue in Germany with the writings of Johann Gottfried Herder and Friedrich Schlegel in the 1810s and 1820s. See Marchand 466.

<sup>8</sup> Marchand 467. For extensive commentary on Dupuis, Volney, Reimarus, and others, see Drews, *Die Leugnung* 7-22, 23-30. See esp. ibid. 7-9, 199 for commentary affirming Volney's work in comparative religions between Buddhism and Christianity.

<sup>9</sup> Marchand 468.

new scholars and an increasingly wide range of lay readers to explore a new, non-biblical, or even expressly anti-biblical, Orient. As scholars ransacked a vast quantity of new textual and archaeological documents, they revealed the powerful influence of Zoroastrian Persia, the esoteric depths of ancient India, and the primeval innovations of the Assyrians and the Sumerians. In their antiquity, spirituality, and apparent purity, these new cultures made the well-known “orientals”—especially ancient Israelites and Egyptians—seem derivative, corrupt, and banal.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the sudden popularity of such publications showed how dangerous, and exciting, oriental philology could be.

### *The Christ Myth*

No incident exemplifies the climax of this intellectual-cultural melee better than the so-called “Christ Myth” debate. Lasting from 31 January to 1 February 1910 in the *Berlin Zoological Garden*, the event sparked considerable controversy across the entire Western world and especially among the eminent theologians, ancient historians, and the mass of some 2,000 spectators who flocked to it.<sup>11</sup> The National Association of Religious Studies and the National Association of Monists, the sponsors of this two-day conflict, must have possessed sharp wit in choosing the location for what transpired into a series of emotionally charged scuffles. After all, for German-speaking Europe the Christ Myth, the last cause célèbre within the milieu of classical modernism, was the explosive outcome of over a decade of cultural tension about the historicity of Jesus, the Gnostic origins of Christianity, and a deepening fascination with the Orient.

For almost a year the German public had expected the two-day affair at the *Berlin Zoological Garden*. It had been promoted by an intense advertising campaign in the

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<sup>10</sup> Marchand 467.

<sup>11</sup> B.A. Gerrish, “Jesus, Myth, and History: Troeltsch’s Stand in the ‘Christ-Myth’ Debate,” *The Journal of Religion*, 55 (Jan. 1975): 13.

spring of 1909, starting when the first appearance of the book *Die Christusmythe* (The Christ Myth) evoked a swift, but very mixed response across all levels of German society and across Western civilization.<sup>12</sup> While dignified scholars such as Adolf Harnack and Ernst Troeltsch showed themselves unimpressed,<sup>13</sup> this contentious essay was greeted with dismay by hoards of the ordinary faithful. Mass demonstrations confirmed the author's impression that, as he himself put it, he had scored a "bull's eye" and touched the sore point of Christianity. He heralded the upcoming event through public lectures, journal articles, and newspaper interviews flooding the German press. Above all, it gave him mischievous satisfaction when the minister for public worship presented himself at protest meetings, where an army of singing choirs, musical instruments, and professions of loyalty to the old faith were duly executed.<sup>14</sup>

This man who moved the faithful to such heights of indignation and alarm was the ancient historian Arthur Drews, and his controversial position was explained in the purpose of his book: "This work seeks to prove that more or less that all features of the picture of the historical Jesus, at any rate all those of any important religious significance, bear a purely mythological character [...]." <sup>15</sup> The Gospel account of a "historical" Jesus had become, so Drews maintained, a pious fiction of the Christian community—an errant belief that emerged as a perversion from the earliest Christian understanding of Jesus as a wholly mythological, not human, being. In fact, the narrative of Jesus's life was essentially a stitching together of older allegorical heroes from the religious cults dating

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<sup>12</sup> Although the book gives no exact printing date, Drew's forward is marked March 1909. See Arthur Drews, C. Delisle Burns. *The Christ Myth* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1910): xii. Given the dates of his newspaper interviews, the book would have had to appear in print by at least early June 1909.

<sup>13</sup> Drews later chagrined that Harnack found the Christ-Myth debate below him in Arthur Drews, Arthur Drews, *Die Leugnung der Geschichtlichkeit Jesu in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Karlsruhe: G. Braun, 1926): 157-158.

<sup>14</sup> Drews, *The Christ Myth* 23-25; Gerrish 13.

<sup>15</sup> Drews, *The Christ Myth* 19.

back to India, Persia, and Babylon. Yet this assortment of myths was far from random; rather, the Gospel stories of Jesus were an erudite collection of Gnostic literature encoded with a message of individual spiritual enlightenment.<sup>16</sup> Thus the roots of Christianity. Should anyone assert that there must have been a historical figure behind the Gospels, at least in order to explain the rise of Christianity, an honest man could only respond: “We know nothing of this Jesus.”<sup>17</sup>

Newspapers worldwide reported the debate as nothing short of sensational, culminating into what the front page of *The New York Times* called “one of the most remarkable theological discussions since the days of Martin Luther.”<sup>18</sup> But “discussion” was hardly the proper word choice, since the crowd participated in the debate almost as much as its speakers. Hecklers ridiculed Drews by quoting satirical works that questioned the historicity of Napoleon, Frederick the Great, and other famous figures. The debate allegedly became so graphic that several women had to be carried away screaming hysterically, while one woman stood on a chair and invoked God to strike Drews down. The theological onslaught on the unscrupulous Drews was led by Dr. Hermann von Soden, Professor of Theology at the University of Berlin and pastor of the Jerusalem Church in Berlin. Defending the orthodoxy of both scientific research and religion, von Soden based his counterargument on pagan, Jewish, and Christian writers of the apostolic age, declaring there was no reason to doubt the very real presence of Jesus in first-century Palestine. Even if firm evidence did deny any such person as Jesus, von

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<sup>16</sup> See esp. ibid. 128-139. Drews articulates this point in his sequel *Die Christusmythe II* (1911), cited here in Joseph McCabe’s English translation of the second edition, *The Witnesses to the Historicity of Jesus* (London: Watts & Co., 1912); see esp. 216-227.

<sup>17</sup> Drews, *The Christ Myth* 19; Gerrish 13.

<sup>18</sup> Anonymous, “Jesus Christ Never Lived, Asserts Prof. Drews: Stirs Germany Deeply by Publicly Attacking Basis of the Christian Religion,” *The New York Times*, February 6, 1910: A1.

Soden added, it would hardly injure the mission of Christianity.<sup>19</sup>

In spite of the uncouth behavior from both the crowd and the stage, a counter confrontation was scheduled for 26 February 1910 in, appropriately, the Bush Circus, where over 20,000 men and women clamored for entrance. Only 5,000 were admitted.<sup>20</sup> By the end of the year, *The Christ Myth* had undergone two more editions in German and its first printing in English.<sup>21</sup> Then, after yet another fiery debate on 12 March the next year, Drews published *Die Christusmythe II: „Die Zeugnisse für die Geschichtlichkeit Jesu“* (The Witnesses to the Historicity of Jesus), with translations soon to follow.<sup>22</sup> Throughout German-speaking Europe and abroad, the debate flooded the public press, university lecture halls, and church pulpits.<sup>23</sup> But while Drews's swing at mainstream Christianity may seem bold, already by 1900 the double-edged claim about Jesus and the Gnostic origins of Christianity was not new for scholars, mostly due to David Friedrich Strauss and Bruno Bauer, during the 1830s.<sup>24</sup> While during the first half of the century such theories were frequently discarded by mainstream scholarship, by the final decade of the century a new generation of scholars revived and revised what they considered crude but unjustly marginalized arguments. Now, the dispute had boiled to the point that it overflowed from scholarly debate and into the public discourse.

Concentrated primarily in Germany, advocates of an ahistorical, Gnostic Jesus included well-established university professors in across Central Europe.<sup>25</sup> As these

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. A1.

<sup>20</sup> Anonymous, “Crowds Protest Jesus Lived: Striking Demonstration in Berlin against Theory of Prof. Drews,” *The New York Times* (27 February 1910): Special Cable News and Sporting Section, C2.

<sup>21</sup> See Drews, *The Christ Myth* 20.

<sup>22</sup> See Anonymous, “A German’s ‘Christ Myth’; Prof. Arthur Drews Carries the Higher Criticism to the Point of Absurdity,” *The New York Times* (26 March 1911): A1.

<sup>23</sup> Anonymous, “Jesus Christ Never Lived, Asserts Prof. Drews: Stirs Germany Deeply by Publicly Attacking Basis of the Christian Religion,” in *The New York Times*, February 6, 1910.

<sup>24</sup> Gerrish 13-14.

<sup>25</sup> The works of scholars who by 1900 had published works advocating an ahistorical, Gnostic understanding of Jesus

scholars questioned Western superiority in light of new evidence, their anticlerical sympathies became less subtle into the twentieth century. The British historian Edwin Johnson, for example, chose to remain anonymous when publishing his first treatise, *Antiqua Mater: A Study of Christian Origins*, in 1887, but, by 1904, his works were proudly proclaiming his identity with subheadings such as: “author of ‘The Rise of Christendom,’ ‘The Pauline Epistles,’ ‘Antiqua Mater,’ etc.”<sup>26</sup> Other bourgeois autodidacts and scholars, equally well known for their publications on the Gnostic origins of Christianity, were less refined in their calls for intellectual revisionism. In particular, the Dutch philosopher Gerard Bolland, the Italian politician and historian Emilio Bossi, and the Polish lawyer and journalist Andrzej Niemojewski charged their works with loosely masked endorsements for the abandonment of conventional Christianity altogether.<sup>27</sup>

But anticlerical was not synonymous with anti-Christian, since the most prominent among the proponents of an ahistorical, Gnostic Jesus were in fact theologians. Most notable among them were members of what had become known as the Dutch school of “Radical Criticism,” a movement founded on biblical skepticism. In addition to the denial of the authentic authorship of the Pauline epistles, its members frequently discussed whether the doctrine and dogma of Christianity had been influenced more by concepts in Hellenistic mystery religions than by standard Jewish religiosity. These theologians included Willem C. van Manen, Abraham Dirk Loman, and Gustaaf van den

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are listed in Arthur Drews, *Die Leugnung der Geschichtlichkeit Jesu in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Karlsruhe: G. Braun, 1926). In Germany, Drews listed no less than twelve European scholars who by 1900 had denied the historicity of Jesus, at least in part, and asserted that the origins of the Gospels lie in pre-Christian Gnostic myths.

<sup>26</sup> Cited from Edwin Johnson, *The Rise of English Culture* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1904).

<sup>27</sup> See Drews, *Die Leugnung* 72-73, 199-202.

Bergh van Eysinga, and Allard Pierson.<sup>28</sup> The surviving accounts of Christ, they argued, were fragmentary mystery texts of secret religious cults subscribing to Gnosticism. They contended that the texts' incorporation of esoteric traditions—fraught with Hellenistic concepts like god-man, virgin birth, and a dying-and-resurrecting deity—extended beyond Judaism (in fact, many argued that the Gospels and Pauline epistles were expressly non-Jewish) to pagan beliefs of Babylon. Publishing the bulk of their research during the late 1880s, the Dutch Radicals were personal mentors for aspiring scholars Drews, Johnson, and Bolland.<sup>29</sup>

#### *The “Conflict between Babel & the Bible”*

More than any other orientalist school, Assyriology worked a destructive magic on the Judeo-Christian worldview, allowing scholars to tread with philologically-supported security into the non-biblical ancient East. The discoveries of a pre-Abrahamic “God,” a pre-Noahic “Flood,” and a pre-Edenic “Sabbath” made the *Book of Genesis* obsolete. In two lectures open to the public on 13 January 1902, Friedrich Delitzsch went so far as to indicate that virtually all the motifs and themes from Judeo-Christian religious texts—from the creation narrative to the visions of the prophets—had been lifted directly from the tales and traditions from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, *The War of the Gods*, and the semimythical historical records of Babylon. According to Delitzsch, that Judaism stole the bulk of its myths from this powerful civilization should come as no surprise, since its rabbis did not manage to compose the Pentateuch, the Histories, or the Prophets until their nation’s captivity in Babylon from approximately 600 to 530 BC.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> All these scholars are cited meticulously, especially van Manen, in Drews's *Christ Myth and Witnesses to the Historicity*.

<sup>29</sup> See the section on Dutch Radical Criticism in Drews, *Die Leugnung* 28-37.

<sup>30</sup> While confessions varied in their interpretation of the Bible, all maintained that God had inspired its authors directly. The Babel-Bible controversy was so great that the next year Delitzsch published his two articles, supplementing them

Attracting theologians, state officials, and even Kaiser Wilhelm II himself, Delitzsch surprised his audience with his merciless attack on Judaism and, by extension, Christianity, in their shared claim to revealed religion. Fed up with their ignorance, Delitzsch demanded the public come to terms with cold hard facts that until recently had remained, as one colleague said, the “esoteric doctrine” of scholars.<sup>31</sup> “How times have changed!” proclaimed Delitzsch, pointing to the museums, journals, and pamphlets that gave Europeans unlimited access to the continually emerging archaeological evidence from the East.<sup>32</sup> He referenced a wide variety of “splendid and admirable” evidence currently on display at British and German museums—diorite reliefs, alabaster slabs, and bronze sculptures—implicitly urging his lay audience members to witness for themselves how the primeval visual culture of the Babylonians evoked, even for those unschooled in its religion or language, an uncanny semblance to the vibrant ‘history’ of the Old Testament.<sup>33</sup> Because of the angry response by the erudite and the faithful in sermons, journals, and newspapers, Delitzsch’s lectures and the havoc they stirred quickly gained repute in Germany as the “Babel-Bibel Streit” (conflict between Babel and the Bible).

As if the lectures were not provocative enough, another scandal broke out in the international press as other scholars, most of them German Assyriologists, brashly defended their colleague against all criticisms.<sup>34</sup> When in an open letter the Kaiser

with diagrams, photographs, and images of artifacts, along with the response of the general public in Friedrich Delitzsch, Thomas J. McCormack and W.H. Carruth, trans. *Babel and Bible: Two Lectures on the Significance of Assyriological Research for Religion Embodying the Most Important Criticisms and the Author's Replies* (Chicago, IL: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1903).

<sup>31</sup> This statement was made by Prof. Dr. C. H. Cornill of Breslau University in a journal published 5 July 1902, No. 27 (July 5). Cited in Delitzsch 132.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 2-3.

<sup>33</sup> In addition to the images in his book, Delitzsch’s lectures are punctuated with platitudes referring to the superiority of Babylonian material culture and the overwhelming influence its culture.

<sup>34</sup> See Delitzsch 117.

despaired “Delitzsch the theologian has run away with Delitzsch the historian,”<sup>35</sup> for example, the German-American scholar Paul Carus sneeringly retorted that quite the opposite was the case:

Professor Delitzsch, the son of an equally famous Hebrew scholar and a pious Christian, was from the start an orthodox theologian, and his theology was modified under the influence of his historical investigations. The Emperor, who still clings to the old conception, concedes that “the Old Testament contains many sections which are of a purely human and historical nature,” and even goes so far as to add that they “are *not* God’s revealed word.” [...] Apparently, the Emperor makes a difference between the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures, and in this sense says: Neither does it matter that much of the nimbus of the chosen people will thereby disappear.<sup>36</sup>

This caustic rhetoric represents how an army of disgruntled scholars overstepped their expertise as intellectuals in order to brand the faithful, even the Kaiser, with accusations of outmoded theological beliefs and poor judgment in their comparison of Christian Scripture with Jewish and pagan contemporaries.<sup>37</sup> Convinced that their specialization validated their assertions over the sentimentalism of the untrained faithful, their challenge to the apparently passionate public was to disprove their assertions based on firm evidence and rational modes of argumentation.

In the spirit of Delitzsch’s lectures, the ensuing scholarly tirade dared Christians to consider the scientific evidence and to justify how and where they drew the lines between pure myth and pure history when consulting their sacred canon. The offense erupted in a war of words. Within three years, some 1,650 articles and 68 pamphlets had contributed to the “Babel-Bible” conflict.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> For the Kaiser’s full reaction to the lecture, see his telegram in *ibid.* 120-124.

<sup>36</sup> Cited in *ibid.* 139.

<sup>37</sup> Responding to the public response to the Delitzsch lecture, Harnack admitted: “From the point of view of scholars there was, indeed, no real controversy. It has long been known that a portion of the myths and legends of the Old Testament, together with important elements of ancient Israelitish civilization, had their origin in Babylon.” But he quickly adds that “a hundred other observed facts” point in support of the inspiration behind the Old Testament (Cited in *ibid.* 125).

<sup>38</sup> Machand 469.

As the director of the Near Eastern Department of the Royal Museums, the co-founder of the German Oriental Society, and the author of numerous works on the Assyrian language, history, and culture, Delitzsch was certainly a scholar whose opinion, no matter how bold, merited respect. But Delitzsch, fifty-two at the time of his lectures, was faithfully supported by a band of slightly younger German Assyriologists known as the Panbabylonians. By the turn of the century, the Panbabylonians had gained notoriety for flipping the modern understanding of the ancient world on its head with robust expositions on the latest archaeological discoveries and manuscripts from the ancient Orient. Their most published proponents included Alfred Jeremias, Hugo Winckler, Heinrich Zimmern, Eduard Stucken, Franz Boll, and, soon, Wilhelm Erbt—none who were over forty by the “Babel-Bible” lectures.<sup>39</sup> Regarded as foolproof as it was controversial, the Panbabylonians’ body of research was frequently cited by well-established colleagues in their field. While Delitzsch did not consider himself a Panbabylonian, for example, he definitely pulled from their research to draw his own conclusions.<sup>40</sup> Returning this favor, many Panbabylonians, like Jeremias, would defend Delitzsch in the popular press in the weeks following his lectures.<sup>41</sup>

For the Panbabylonians, newfound law codes, hymns, and cultic rituals did more than literally allow them to rewrite history.<sup>42</sup> From their perspective, this rapid influx of sources had come just in time to ensure truly objective research. Contrasting his generation with its theologically-trained predecessors in 1898, Winckler claimed that

<sup>39</sup> These scholars had also influenced Arthur Drews. See Drews’s *Christ Myth* and his forward to his *Das Markusevangelium als Zeugnis Gegen die Geschichtlichkeit Jesu* (Jena: Eugen Dietrichs Verlag, 1921).

<sup>40</sup> Jeremias, Winckler, and Zimmern, for example, are all cited in Delitzsch, 137-139, 151, 155, 162-163.

<sup>41</sup> Jeremias is cited in ibid. 137-139.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Zimmern’s *Beiträge zur Kenntnis der babylonischen Religion* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1896-1901), *Vergleichende Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen* (Berlin: Reuther und Reichard, 1898), *Babylonische Hymnen und Gebete* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1905), and *Sumerische Kultlieder aus altbabylonischer Zeit* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1912); and Winckler’s *Gesetze Hammurabis* (1904).

orientalists could for the first time embark on a “pure philological-historical engagement with the Semites.”<sup>43</sup> Scholarship, suggested Winckler, could only be truly scientific once cleansed of Christian biases. Like other defenders of Delitzsch, the Panbabylonians seldom missed an opportunity to step out of their specialized field to rebuke the public for its reluctance to embrace the objective proofs of the scientific community.<sup>44</sup> Belligerence aside, their zeal and adamant stance reflect the fact that German orientalists had finally struck a treasure trove of evidence in a nonwestern source that in turn liberated them from the classicist stronghold. According to veteran historian Eduard Meyer when he surveyed the Assyriological discoveries between 1885 and 1908, everything he and his contemporaries had known about the ancient Orient from the Old Testament and the Greeks had been called into question, and mostly destroyed.<sup>45</sup>

### *The Turfan Expeditions*

In addition to scholarly debates that made their way into public forums, German-speaking Europe’s cultural hype surrounding the discoveries of the ancient Orient gained wide publicity in national museum exhibits. As Meyer’s astonishment about newfangled ideas in Assyriology suggests, the turn-of-the-century sensationalism that had hailed ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt—so entralling to the European public in previous decades—was suddenly swept away by an even greater cultural enthusiasm for temple ruins, pagan shrines, and forgotten wealth in the Near and Far East. Of course, the paradox behind this intellectual subversion was underscored by the fact that the German government largely sponsored its agenda. Since 1874, the German Empire had officially staked its claim as a global leader in the excavation, reconstruction, and interpretation of the

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<sup>43</sup> Marchand 469.

<sup>44</sup> See the criticism of Christian theology in, e.g., Wilhelm Erbt, *Das Markusevangelium : eine Untersuchung über die Form der Petrusinnerungen und die Geschichte der Urgemeinde* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1911).

<sup>45</sup> Marchand 468.

ancient world when the newly established German Reichstag founded the German Archaeological Institute at Athens. Focused on sites in ancient Greece, the Institute provided a basis for national culture. Supervised by respected experts like Heinrich Schliemann and Wilhelm Dörpfeld, its excavations allowed Germany to glean untold treasures from underdeveloped countries like Turkey and Greece while whetting the public fascination through state museums and exhibitions.<sup>46</sup>

However, the findings from the ancient Orient resituated the nationalistic campaign as archaeological discoveries turned up more frequently in the East. In addition to the mystery behind what, when, and where the next untold treasure might be discovered, excavations stirred public imagination because no one, not even experts themselves, could surmise exactly *how much* treasure may await discovery—or what forms these treasures may take. Such euphoria broke out across Europe when, between 1902 and 1914, archaeologists at the Prussian Academy of Sciences returned to Berlin from four expeditions along the old silk routes from Persia to China. Each time, their destination was the same: the ruins of thirteenth-century temples and sacred caves on the northern fringe of the Taklamakan Desert in China, in the area of Turfan.<sup>47</sup> What the expedition team found at the initial site became the greatest find to rock the fin-de-siècle conception of the ancient world. In addition to thousands of art objects, it fell upon a huge collection parchment fragments in seventeen languages ranging from Syriac to Chinese, two of which (Sogdian and Tocharian) were previously unknown.<sup>48</sup>

When the first expedition team returned to the Museum of Ethnology at Berlin on 6 July 1903, widespread excitement ensued. Across Europe the explorers received

<sup>46</sup> This public interest described with grandiose rhetoric in Delitzsch 1-2.

<sup>47</sup> Grimstad 15-16.

<sup>48</sup> There is a succinct discussion of the 1902-1914 Turfan expeditions in King 81-82. Apparently, the amount of texts found at Turfan was so great that still today only about one-fourth of them have been published.

unparalleled publicity in the popular press for their find. National museums, the focal point of German culture, featured a treasure trove of various Buddhist statues, sculptural fragments, fresco paintings, wall inscriptions, and coins. The great steel manufacturer Friedrich Krupp, who in part funded the expedition, returned with some 44 crates full of artifacts plus 13 crates containing zoological objects. Impressed, the Kaiser responded to the sensational accomplishments of the first expedition by donating 32,000 marks from his private purse to supplement the following expedition to Turfan.<sup>49</sup>

But the item to impress Europeans most was the mother lode of manuscripts, part of which, upon their translation by the team's chief archaeologist Albert von Le Coq, turned out to be scriptures from a religious sect known as Manichaeism. Outside polemics of Church Fathers like St. Augustine, before 1902 scholars knew next to nothing of this religious movement or its leader, Mani, whom they had only understood as a third-century prophet whose version of Christianity became the main rival to mainstream Christianity in Iran. Until the discovery in China, scholars had considered the movement as little more than a localized heresy, certainly not a transcontinental phenomenon that thrived well into the seventh century.<sup>50</sup> Despite their poor shape, the Manichaean writings, filled with dualist symbols and redeemer myths, proved an invaluable resource for understanding the beginnings of Christianity in an untainted Gnostic context.<sup>51</sup>

While the Turfan texts, as they became called, were new to scholars, their esoteric narratives were not. Rather, Le Coq noted their message echoed the asceticism taught by

<sup>49</sup> Grimstad 15.

<sup>50</sup> King notes that by 1902 many Gnostic texts, such as the Manichaean materials, had never been "lost." From the perspective of European scholars these manuscripts were indeed "discovered," since they had not previously known of these writings in particular. King 298, n. 27; 81.

<sup>51</sup> King indicates that a more recent archaeological discovery and 1988 publication of the *Cologne Mani Codex* prove conclusively that Manichaeism originated from a Jewish-Christian sect in Syria around 100 AD. Had turn-of-the-century scholars known this, they obviously would have not used Manichaeism to investigate the beginnings of Christianity (81).

Mandaeanism,<sup>52</sup> a pre-Christian Gnostic sect whose adherents embraced the secret teachings of John the Baptist and still baptized one another along the lower Euphrates and Tigris Rivers in Iraq and near the Karun River in Iran. Mandaeanism had recently become another hot topic in Germany beginning in the early 1890s, when Wilhelm Brandt and Mark Lidzbarski agreed that Mandaeanism's quasi-Jewish teachings were a central influence on Jesus and the rise of Christianity. Analyzing their religious texts in his *Die Mandaische Religion* (1889), Brandt concluded that, given the strong anti-Christian and anti-Jewish polemic in their writings, its tradition must have originated as a polytheistic type of "Semitic nature religion" that continued various water rites, including baptism, that eventually merged with "Chaldean philosophy."<sup>53</sup>

But if the Gnosticism taught by Mani resembled pre-Christian Mandaeanism, German scholars also associated its teachings with a second-century Gnostic sect, Marcionism. Like Mandaeanism, Marcionism was overtly anti-Jewish, and equally mystical. Its founder was a wealthy ship owner from Pontus in Asia Minor, Marcion, who maintained that a literal interpretation of Scripture led to an inadequate understanding of God's salvation. Whereas other early Christian apologists condoned allegorical and typological interpretations to reconcile their beliefs with Jewish Scripture, Marcion read the Gospel, the Pauline epistles, and the Jewish Pentateuch literally. Assembling his own canon of Christian Scripture more than a century before the Council of Nicea convened in AD 325, Marcion asserted that there were two Gods: the true higher God of Jesus and Paul, and

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<sup>52</sup> Mandaeanism had been a controversial topic in scholarship since the 1750 publication of Johann David Michaelis' Introduction to the *Divine Scriptures to the New Covenant*, which explained the pivotal role John the Baptist's teachings within the Gnostic tenants of Mandaean. Ibid. 83-85.

<sup>53</sup> At its core, Brandt asserted, Mandaeanism was Babylonian rather than Christian or Jewish, and that the Greek, Jewish, Gnostic, and Persian conceptions had been added during the history of its long development. Europeans had known of the existence of Mandaeanism since the thirteenth century, when the Italian traveller Rialdus investigated their lifestyle and practice. Ibid. 81-82, 83-84.

the inferior creator God of the Jews. Compiling the Gospel of Luke and Paul's writings, Marcion professed to reestablish the true message of Jesus by restoring a doctrine that was in danger of contamination from Judaizing interpolations.<sup>54</sup>

In these ways, doctrinal similarities between Mandaeanism, Manichaeism, and Marcionism contributed to blasting the modern conception about the impact of Gnosticism and its cohesion among aggregate religious communities throughout the ancient world—not just Greece, Rome, and the Holy Lands, but the farthest stretches of the Orient. In the light of the perplexing textual evidence and its threat to modern scholarship (not to mention theology), young classicists, theologians, and religious scholars—i.e., non-orientalists—like the preeminent Rudolf Bultmann, Wilhelm Bousset, and Richard Reitzenstein would soon dedicate their careers into the upcoming decades trying to reconcile the varieties of early Christian experience as they blended with Gnosticism and other mystical religious philosophies of the East.

As evidenced by textual discoveries like those from Turfan, their claims about pre-Christian, non-Western, Gnostic redeemer myths would shatter the traditional understanding of early Christianity.<sup>55</sup> This religion was *not* a homogeneous movement from which fringe heretics only occasionally splintered as a result of doctrinal disagreement with orthodox teaching. This errant notion—as Winckler, Delitzsch, Wellhausen, and others suggested—was merely a hangover from the preindustrial theological biases inherent in their own academic community, based for centuries on *what had become* orthodox Christianity. By placing this belief system in its intellectual

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<sup>54</sup> It must be noted that Marcion, like other Christian-Gnostics such as Ptolemy, did not reject Jewish texts entirely. They elaborated their theologies with extensive reference to Judaism and its tradition, but they privileged the revelation of the Savior and in turn used His words to critique Judaism. For a thorough account of Marcion and his teachings, see *ibid.* 44-45, 46.

<sup>55</sup> For a review of these three scholars and their work in comparative religions, see King 84-107. See e.g., Grimstad 14-17.

context, even religious scholars promoted their scholarship as science, viz.

*Religionswissenschaft*, which would free the study of Christianity from dogmatic limits and the institutional structures of theology to the field of professed objectivity and the institutional structures of the secular university.<sup>56</sup>

### *The New Perspective*

In the wake of these controversies which undermined the heritage of Greece and Rome, and especially the authenticity and authority of Judaism and Christianity as revealed religion, Arthur Drews's Christ Myth dealt a heavy blow to the standard understanding of the Western heritage. Yet, as he himself openly noted in 1909, his book was hardly original.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, its thesis marked a significant turn in biblical criticism because it went one step further by applying to the Savior of the World the same question which orientalists like Winckler, Erbt, and Delitzsh had long set against personalities in pagan mythology, surfacing heretical texts, the Apocrypha, and the Old Testament. Drews's supporters underscored his thesis perfectly when, on the eve of his first debate, they gallivanted around Berlin and plastered the city kiosks with a poster emblazoned with the lone question: "Did Jesus Christ ever live?"<sup>58</sup> While Drews's question was not entirely new, his answer was: Jesus *never could have* lived.

This approach turned the traditional question in Jesus scholarship on its head. Whereas scholars of religion such as the Dutch Radicals had long asserted that Jesus was an idealized person exaggerated by later followers, Drews argued that Jesus was a personified ideal turned into a historical man through subsequent theological

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<sup>56</sup> King 71-73.

<sup>57</sup> Gerrish 14-16.

<sup>58</sup> Gerrish 15.

misguidance. Even the most skeptical treatments of primitive Christian documents assumed that behind all the fanciful narratives of the Gospels lay a real human life. Drews, in contrast, held that the “real” Jesus was a deity—not a deified man, but a humanized god transcribed into a semihistorical context.<sup>59</sup> Instead of trying to scrape through centuries of Christian piety and theological reflection that overlaid a historical Jesus with motifs of Hellenistic religions,<sup>60</sup> Drews claimed that the Gospels do not record a rudimentary biography of an actual man but rather convey the Jesus myth in quasi-mythic form. Even for those among his audience innocent of learning in 1910, this logic left no historical object on which the dogma of a historically based Christianity could rest.

Following the lead of other classicists, Drews appealed to the evidence in philology and archaeology from the ancient Orient that the first Christians could have only been Gnostics. But now he projected their approach into the New Testament and after. Gnosticism, he declared in a debate in 1912, had been so central to Christian doctrine that its earliest defenders, sending their epistles and apologetics to specific communities, simply expected their recipients to have been initiated into the same spiritual mysteries and thus understand allusions to symbolic language and cryptic jargon. By examining the stylized Greek in First Corinthians, for instance, Drews deconstructed its passages to assert that St. Paul’s use of Hellenistic-era Gnostic terminology proved that the apostle “knew nothing of a historical Jesus”:

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<sup>59</sup> Though Gerrish asserts this claim in his article, further research must investigate whether this claim is true. While this claim seems correct for such biblical scholars like the Dutch Radicals and the German orientalists, the case of late eighteenth-century scholars, which Drews references in his *Die Leugnung*, seems less certain.

<sup>60</sup> Drews demonstrated that a “Jesus cult” had in all likeliness predated Christianity as far back as the figure Joshua in Genesis. As the Greek version of the original Hebrew name implies, over time this cult assimilated Jewish apocalyptic ideas and the Hellenistic motif of a dying and rising redeemer. Gerrish 15-16.

[T]he apostle speaks [in 2:6] of the “princes of this world,” who knew not what they did when they “crucified the Lord of glory.” [B]y these “princes” we must understand, not the Jewish or Roman authorities, nor any terrestrial powers whatever, but the “enemies of this world,” the demons higher powers, which do indeed rule the earth for a time, but will “pass away” before the coming triumph of the savior-God. That is precisely the Gnostic idea of the death of the Redeemer, and it is here put forward by Paul; from that we may infer that he did not conceive the life of Jesus as an historical event, but a general metaphysical drama, in which heaven and earth struggle for the mastery.

It is well known that prominent Gnostics like Basilides, Valentine, and especially Marcion, appeal confidently to Paul. Marcion’s liking for Paul won him the name of “apostle of the heretics.” All this may be explained in the sense that the Gnosticism of the second century had a source in Paul, and appropriated his ideas in the exposition of their own doctrines.<sup>61</sup>

Tracing the Gnostic spirit as it disseminated from the visionary authors of the New Testament, Drews suggested that fourth-century Catholic dogma, with its exoteric interpretation of Scripture, held little authority in its claim to tradition, let alone its distinction between so-called apostates and saints. Given the supposedly skewed hindsight of present-day Christian orthodoxy, he asserted “it is just as possible that both Paulinism and Gnosticism belong to the same age, and are only different branches from the same root.”<sup>62</sup>

For some, orientalism and the discoveries from the East bolstered presumptions about the dominance of modern Europe itself. By assimilating this new evidence in his conception of the ancient world, for example, the Pan-German Viennese writer Houston Steward Chamberlain based the research behind his two-volume magnum opus *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century,

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<sup>61</sup> In the unabridged argument, Drews cites van Manen and other predecessors (*Witnesses to the Historicity* 111-112). One of the most prominent feminist and Gnostic-inspired spiritualities of *fin-de-siècle* Britain, Swiney was immensely on the occult and Gnosticism and their applicability in modern living. Her nationality should not devalue the fact that her observations cover the sentiment of many Europeans engaged in the Gnostic revival. For this reason, her statements and summaries about Gnostic doctrine will be referenced throughout this study.

<sup>62</sup> Despite his opposition to making Jesus a historical figure, Drews speculated that the turning of the true Gnostic Christianity into an exoteric religion was inevitable. He examined early Church Fathers such as Hegesippus who inquired about the historically real disciples who claimed to have had physical ties to Jesus, viz. James, the brother of Jesus. Drews, of course, would contend that these ties, if at all real, had metaphysical rather than biological significance. See *ibid.* 89-90; 112.

1899) on pseudo-biological theories in Darwinism as much as anthropology on ancient Tibet, the alleged homeland of the prehistoric Teutonic peoples. Albeit *völkisch*, Chamberlain's racialism differed from traditional Eurocentric pan-Germanic theories because his philosophy looked to the orientalist discourse to burst asunder what he called the "Hellenic megalomania" of classical culture.<sup>63</sup> In *Arische Weltanschauung* (Aryan Worldview, 1905), he extolled the burgeoning anti-western vein in contemporary scholarship: "Indology, born out of life, leads back to life; apart from academic results, it should, paired with life, create new life; a great purpose lies ahead of it."<sup>64</sup> For Chamberlain, Indology, a fresh branch of scientific research, was as essential for exploring the prestige of ancient civilization as for obtaining its primal glory once again in future eons.

As the orientalist cultural craze overtook the West, its pervasiveness in German-speaking academia cannot be understated. Iconoclastic classicists, art historians, and Near Eastern specialists were chipping away at classical serenity, autonomy, and originality, and used, significantly, evidence from the Orient to tear down old prejudices and norms. The Vienna school of art history contributed to the development of a non-aestheticizing history of artistic forms, and the study of what has become known as late antiquity. These two innovations allowed contemporaries, firstly, to put Greek forms in historical context, and, secondly, to appreciate the non-representational art of the East. A driving force behind this reform was Josef Strzygowski, who in 1902 passionately glorified Near Eastern and *völkisch* forms in his influential polemic on the oriental origins of medieval art entitled *Orient or Rome?* Strzygowski's emphasis on the frailty

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<sup>63</sup> See n. 10 in Marchand 469.

<sup>64</sup> Cited in Meyer 1.

of the Western tradition and the power of the Orient was particularly aggressive. But its assertions were by no means bizarre or unusual to his generation, and his appointment to the new chair of non-European art history at the University of Vienna in 1909 attests to the visibility of the fresh, non-biblical, anti-classical orientalism in *fin-de-siècle* culture.<sup>65</sup>

#### ESOTERIC SCHOOLS & THE “SPIRITUAL SCIENCES”

As much as Gnosticism was a point of contention among scholars, participants of the occult movement concerned themselves with the understanding, placement, and relevance of its philosophy within modernity. Intimately engaged with the numerous heterodox scriptures that were continually resurfacing from the Near and Far East during the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, neo-Gnostics across Europe reviewed, analyzed, and interpreted ancient manuscripts with all the austere familiarity of the scholars who publicized Gnosticism. Evaluating the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, the *Pistis Sophia*, and other ancient Christian-Gnostic texts recovered to date, one mystic wrote in 1909:

It is said by the occultists that the present spiritual evolution of man will proceed, not through a new inspiration or a new gospel, but by a more thorough knowledge, understanding and interpretation of the ancient and forgotten wisdom of past ages, uniting it in harmony with the scientific truths gained by modern research. This renaissance of the religious literature of archaic faiths will come as a revelation to all who are moved by the spirit to discern the deep esoteric realities underlying the symbolism and phraseology of the seers and mystics of old times.<sup>66</sup>

Charged with allusions to positivism and evolutionary theory, this statement reveals much about how turn-of-the-century Gnostics transliterated the message of ancient esoteric texts into a cosmology compatible with the modernist worldview. Similar to

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<sup>65</sup> Marchand 469.

<sup>66</sup> Frances Swiney, *The Esoteric Teachings of the Gnostics* (London: Yellon, Williams & Co., 1909): 1.

their scholarly counterparts who promulgated Gnosticism in order to provoke Westerners to question their spiritual and ideological heritage, the bourgeois leaders of the occult movement appealed to its elitist teachings in societies and organizations in order to investigate the sacred nature of its teachings as a superior, non-Eurocentric spiritual alternative to the Judeo-Christian tradition. In the decades leading up to the Great War, German-speaking Europe boasted a litany of esoteric schools that made Gnosticism accessible to a public spiritually impoverished and cerebrally dissatisfied by institutional religion.

It would seem that these Gnostic societies lifted their doctrines straight from the orientalist discourse. Yet while academics unleashed their archaeological, philological, and historical research about Gnosticism starting around 1900, mainstream European occultists had been promulgating variants of this ancient philosophy for nearly thirty years. Most notably, the Russian aristocrat Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky began winning a popular following throughout the United States and Europe for bridging Gnostic ideas with the ancient Orient and occult phenomena in her international Theosophical Society, which she founded in 1875.<sup>67</sup> After multiple journeys to India, Nepal, China, Japan, and the Americas from the 1850s until her death in 1891, Blavatsky claimed to communicate telepathically with Hindu gurus and transcribe spiritual wisdom of the ancients by divination in order to convey her teachings. Attracting an international assortment of mystics and occultists including the German medical doctor Franz Hartmann, the Austrian chemist Carl Kellner, and the Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner, Blavatsky ensured that Theosophy would preserve “the archaic Wisdom-

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<sup>67</sup> Treitel, *Science for the Soul* 85; 74.

Religion, the esoteric doctrine once known in every ancient country having claims to civilization.”<sup>68</sup>

By the turn of the century, however, Blavatsky’s doctrine suffered an ideological split as Hartmann, Kellner, and Steiner eventually turned from their involvement with Theosophy in order to rework “spiritual science” into transcendent alternatives more suitable for an increasingly industrialized and egalitarian West.<sup>69</sup> Whereas Blavatsky and her entourage prioritized Eastern mysticism in order to awaken what they considered the “dogmatic slumber” of Western spirituality, these German-speaking seekers, while initially attracted to and still inspired by the ancient Orient, denied the Russian mystic’s claim that the Western spiritual tradition had become displaced from its arcane practice and subsumed by an oppressive power of ruling elites.<sup>70</sup> Instead, they reverted to the mysticism in the Judeo-Christian tradition—taking up such occult sciences as astrology and alchemy—in order to revive Gnosticism for modern Westerners not savvy with the teachings of Hinduism, Buddhism, and venues of Eastern esotericism. Interweaving scientific assessment with subjective experience, Hartmann, Kellner, and Steiner, while valuing the Orient for its own contributions to ancient wisdom, prioritized the esoteric tradition of the West for the edification of German-speaking Europe in in their writings and lectures.

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<sup>68</sup> This definition comes from Blavatsky’s article “What is Theosophy?” (originally published Oct. 1879), reprinted in Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, ed., *The Theosophist: A Monthly Journal Devoted to Oriental Philosophy, Art, Literature, and Occultism: Vol. I 1879-1880* (Madras: Graves, Cookson, and Co., 1884): 2.

<sup>69</sup> The term “spiritual science” was used most often by Steiner, but its use within the modern occult movement seems to have originated with Blavatsky and Theosophy.

<sup>70</sup> Theosophy was largely influenced by Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, and the teachings of Lao Tzu. In part, the reason for the proliferation of Theosophy and the Victorian occult movement during the late nineteenth century was due to educated Europe’s cultural exposure to Eastern religious texts, though many had long been known to exist. See Owen 30-32. A thorough discussion of the mission of Blavatsky’s “secret doctrine” is discussed in Daniël van Egmond, “Western Esoteric Schools in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” in *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times* 315, 338. Hugh B. Urban, *Magia Sexualis: Sex, Magic, and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006): 313-314.

The culmination of their popularity led these men to found two esoteric schools, Hartmann and Kellner the Ordo Templi Orientis (Order of the Temple of the East, or O.T.O.), and Steiner the Anthroposophical Society. Despite their occidentalization, these schools largely resembled Theosophy in their approach to Gnosticism. Both taught their students particular theories and practices that enabled them to transform themselves into human beings who were aware of, and guided by, their “higher selves” or “souls.” As such, they taught that humans are not merely biological organisms but rather complex beings constituted of physical, physiological, psychological, and ethereal dimensions corresponding to “inner worlds” that are constitutive of the phenomenological universe. According to this conception, man is “asleep” or “dead” as long as his consciousness is confined to the physical and psychological aspects of his constitution. Only once man’s personality and body become receptive to the influence of the spirit through a series of occult initiations, Hartmann, Kellner, and Steiner—like other leaders of esoteric schools across Europe in the *fin de siècle*—maintained that a true existential transformation was possible.<sup>71</sup>

### *Ordo Templi Orientis*

The early history of Ordo Templi Orientis is as vague as its practices were unusual in the occult movement of the *fin de siècle*. Founded in either Germany or Austria sometime between 1895 and 1904,<sup>72</sup> the O.T.O. was Kellner and Hartmann’s collaboration to bring together the Western esoteric tradition, viz. alchemy, with secret cults from the ancient

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<sup>71</sup> For more on the shared teachings of esoteric schools during this period, especially the Theosophical Society and The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, see Egmond esp. 311-312.

<sup>72</sup> While the O.T.O. possessed no official charter until 1906, the order was mentioned in Reuss’s *Historische Ausgabe der Oriflamme* in 1904. For the disputed origins of the O.T.O., see Egmond 336. See also Dvorak and Stephen E. Flowers, *Fraternitas Saturni: The Brotherhood of Saturn; An Introduction to its History, Philosophy, and Rituals* Third Edition (Smithville, TX: Runa-Raven Press, 2006): 4-5.

Orient, most notably from the Babylonian and Hindu religions. The rites and rituals appear to have been largely a composite of the knowledge of Kellner and Hartmann, both who, struck with a feverish curiosity of ancient Eastern philosophies, had embarked on individual sojourns to Asia and India during the 1880s. Returning to German-speaking Europe as bearers of ancient wisdom, Hartmann and Kellner would later found their order as a radical challenge the rational, progressive European mindset.

Hartmann and Kellner's journeys into the East are notable because on the one hand they represented the mystic quests of Europeans such as Blavatsky who were disillusioned with exoteric Western religiosity, while on the other hand they resembled scholarly expeditions to investigate the legacy of human civilization to non-Western origins. During extensive travels in Asia in 1885, Kellner came into contact with an Islamic Sufi named Soliman ben Aifa and two Hindu Tantrics named Bhima Sena Pratapa and Sri Mahatma Agamya Paramahamsa. Kellner's quest then led him to the United States, where he sought initiation into the Hermetic Brotherhood of Light, an organization steeped in Eastern mysticism. He suggested that, collectively, these teachings enabled him to discover "the Key" to total explanation of the complex symbolism of Freemasonry, which allowed one to unlock the mysteries of Nature.<sup>73</sup> Interestingly, Kellner's revelation coincided with his introduction to Hartmann, who had recently returned from India, when the two collaborated on developing a "ligno-sulphite" inhalation therapy for whooping cough and tuberculosis for patients at

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<sup>73</sup> Kellner's revelation, it must be noted, came after a long study of Western occultism, so it must be assumed that his insight was not merely the product of his adventures in Asia. He was also a Freemason at the time. Egmond 96, 98; 287, n. 51. See also Flowers 5.

Hartmann's sanitarium near Salzburg. Soon thereafter, Hartmann introduced Kellner and his wife to Theosophy.<sup>74</sup>

As this incident suggests, the charismatic Hartmann was integral in bringing the Orient to German-speaking Europe. After cofounding the new international headquarters for the Theosophical Society at Adyar with Blavatsky in 1883, two years later he helped establish the society's first official branch in Berlin, became the president of its chapter in Vienna, and translated many Theosophical treatises into German.<sup>75</sup> A student of Rosicrucianism, astrology, and geomancy, the doctor was also noted for his biographies of Jakob Böhme and Paracelsus<sup>76</sup> and, later, investigations such as *The Life of Jehoshua, the Prophet of Nazareth: An Occult Study and a Key to the Bible Containing the History of an Initiate* (1897) and *The Esoteric Meaning behind the Symbols of the Bible and the Church* (1898).<sup>77</sup> But in spite of this emphasis on Western mysticism, Hartmann's focal point became markedly easternized in such works as *Among the Adepts: Confidential Messages from the Circles of Indian Adepts and Christian Mystics* (1901),<sup>78</sup> his theosophical periodical *Lotusblüthen* (Lotus Flowers, 1893-1900/1908-1915),<sup>79</sup> his translations of Lao-tzu and the *Bhagavad Gita*, and in his lectures on such diverse topics

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<sup>74</sup> Josef Dvorak, "Prä-Ordo Templi Orientis: Carl Kellner, Franz Hartmann, Theodor Reuss," *Flensburger Hefte* 63 (Dez. 1998), accessed 23 August 2014, URL: [<http://www.parareligion.ch/sunrise/carl.htm>]. See also Marchand 470.

<sup>75</sup> Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore, MA: John Hopkins University Press, 2004): 62, 95-96.

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, Hartmann's *Die Mystik in Goethes "Faust": Eine Betrachtung* (Leipzig: Theosophisches Verlagshaus, 1918), *Life and the Doctrines of Philippus Theophrastus Bombast of Hohenheim Known by the Name of Paracelsus, and the Substance of his Teachings* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1887), and *Die Symbole der Bibel und der Kirche, ihre esoterische Bedeutung* (Leipzig: Theosophisches Verlag., Haus Vollrath, 1898).

<sup>77</sup> See Franz Hartmann, *Jehoshua, der Prophet von Nazareth oder Buchstücke aus den Mysterien: die Geschichte einer wahren Initiation und ein Schlüssel zum Verständnis der Allegorien der Bibel* (Leipzig: Friedrich, 1897) and *The Life of Jehoshua, the Prophet of Nazareth: An Occult Study and a Key to the Bible Containing the History of an Initiate* (Eng. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1909).

<sup>78</sup> Citation for German original: Franz Hartmann, *Unter den Adepten: Vertrauliche Mittheilungen aus den Kreisen der indischen Adepten und christlichen Mystiker* (Leipzig: Lotus-Verlag, 1901).

<sup>79</sup> Treitel 40-41.

as Buddhism, Taoism, and Hatha yoga.<sup>80</sup>

Hartmann and Kellner's spirituality, however, remained unformulated until the urging of the Anglo-German journalist and occultist Theodor Reuss. While apparently neither a Theosophist nor traveller to the Orient, Reuss's endeavors had pivotal influence on the European revival of Gnosticism and Kellner's founding of the O.T.O. During a series of conversations with Hartmann and Kellner in 1895, Reuss purportedly devised the plan for an esoteric brotherhood based on a complex fusion of Craft Masonry, Rosicrucianism, and various Eastern imports including all the techniques of Hindu Tantra and sex magic. Its doctrine also pulled heavily from the Hermetic Brotherhood of Light, whose chapter in Berlin both Kellner and Reuss oversaw.<sup>81</sup> While nothing verifiable exists for this brotherhood until 1904, Kellner formally chartered it as *Ordo Templi Orientis* in 1906.<sup>82</sup> For Reuss, the O.T.O. was nothing short of a Gnostic religious liberation from an outmoded, repressive Christian worldview: "A new civilization, a new system of morals will arise from the new Christianity of the gnostic Templar-Christians. [...] [T]he Church of the gnostic Neo-Christians seeks to found communities [...] of sinless, i.e. freed from the Nazarene-Christian idea of original sin, people."<sup>83</sup> Even if misdirected, the O.T.O. became the first genuine attempt at cross-cultural synthesis between Eastern and Western esoteric traditions in the name of Gnosticism.

In spite of Reuss's enthusiasm, the O.T.O. was largely derived from the revelatory

<sup>80</sup> For Hartmann's translations and lectures, see his *Theosophie in China: Betrachtungen über das Tao-Teh-King (Der Weg, die Wahrheit und das Licht)* (Leipzig: Lotus Verlag, 1897), *Was ist Yoga?* (Calw-Wimberg/Württemberg: Schatzkammerverlag Fändrich, 1962), and *Das Evangelium Buddhas: sein Leben und seine Lehre* (Calw: Schatzkammerverlag Margarete Ullrich, 1994).

<sup>81</sup> For more on the Hermetic Brotherhood of Light, see Urban 79. For Reuss' involvement, see Urban 96.

<sup>82</sup> The organization was formalized in 1904. Supposedly, Reuss had originally suggested they form an *Academia Masonica* that would enable all Freemasons to become familiar with all the existing degrees and systems of Freemasonry. See Urban 97-98, 104. Dvorak.

<sup>83</sup> Urban 96.

knowledge Kellner received after his world travels. Before founding the O.T.O., he searched for various public venues where he could convey his knowledge to a public interested in exotic spirituality as well as modern physical culture. In 1896, Hartmann invited him to the Third International Congress on Psychology in Munich, where he gave demonstrations on the psychophysiological benefits of Hatha yoga. Into the 1900s, Kellner discussed the mystical aspects of yoga at Vienna's so-called Indian clubs.<sup>84</sup> Equipping all his homes with small gymnasia, he hired Georg Jagendorfer—popularly known as “the strongest man in Vienna”—to give private lessons to both him and his children in Indian club-swinging exercises, which Kellner valued for its cardiovascular workout and its meditative breathing technique.<sup>85</sup> In his application of ancient wisdom as a mystic, a therapist, and a father, Kellner was able to integrate Eastern philosophy into daily life in Western modernism.

But Kellner incorporated a different sort of arcane knowledge into the O.T.O. Following his attention to the mutual health of body and spirit, much of his and Reuss's literature for the order mixed the complicated symbolism of alchemy, Hermeticism, and pre-Christian pagan cultures to describe esoteric sex acts. Performed in a liturgical fashion, these practices were ceremonialized in order that initiates might harmonize the rhythmic cycles of their physical and metaphysical selves. In order to catalyze this supposed alignment of the faculties, the rites and rituals of the O.T.O. employed sexualized language that played on alchemical terminology. In addition to the traditionally sublimated significances behind alchemical tools and processes, terms such

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<sup>84</sup> Dvorak; Urban 99.

<sup>85</sup> Kellner on Indian club-swinging exercises: “It strengthens the whole chest as does no other form of exercise; it greatly improves the breathing; it immensely increases the activity of the lungs and heart, in a healthy and harmless way; and it stretches the thorax and its muscles. In brief, it makes it possible for those of sedentary habits or occupation to obtain essential bodily stimulation and activity.” Cited in Dvorak.

as *athanor*, the *blood of the red lion*, and *retort* took on altogether different meanings in Kellner and Reuss's texts.<sup>86</sup> For his most advanced students Kellner developed a magical rite combining yoga, meditation, and Tantra. Supposedly performed in a windowless room in his house, its execution included Kellner acting as "Babylonian Priest" and his wife as "the Great Goddess," and culminated in the generation of divine "Elixir"—i.e. female and male sexual fluids.<sup>87</sup> This sheer carnality was certainly unconventional among occult circles during the early twentieth century, which led Hartmann himself to abandon the society within a few short years.<sup>88</sup>

While the O.T.O. certainly ceremonialized sexual acts, contemporaries only speculated about the rites and rituals of the order. After Hartmann dissolved his membership, articles in Freemasonic journals, dissociating their ranks with the order, accused the O.T.O. of subjecting its initiates to various hetero- and homoerotic acts, prompting investigations by the police.<sup>89</sup> But according to Kellner and Reuss, such measures were entirely unjustified. Instead of devising a indecent perversion of ancient wisdom, they asserted that the Tantric sexual acts of the O.T.O. were essentially the same as that of the Eleusinian mysteries and early Christian Gnosticism, both which he considered as cults of fertility and sensual ecstasy.<sup>90</sup> "The cult of the Phallus," Reuss asserted, had been unintentionally preserved throughout the centuries in popular Christian worship:

In spite of its efforts of the Christian churches, over 120 million people [...] are

<sup>86</sup> For an explication of these terms, see Urban 99-100.

<sup>87</sup> Urban 101.

<sup>88</sup> Dvorak.

<sup>89</sup> Urban 101-102.

<sup>90</sup> In Reuss's own words: "The Eleusian mysteries were pure Phallus cult. The ceremonies were those of the Tantrics. The members of these mysteries partook of such ecstasy that the freedom of the senses came to them as a totally natural by-product [...]. The secret teachings of the Gnostics [Primitive Christians] are identical with the Vamachari rites of the Tantrics [...]." Cited in Urban 100.

still practitioners of the sex cult [Lingam-Yoni], which surely shows the need to spread widely authentic material about phallism. [...] [T]he Catholic Church uses, in a hidden form, the phallus worship, Lingam-Yoni cult [...] taken from so-called Pagan rituals [...]. It was the leading religious cult during the fullest flowering of the cultures of classical antiquity, and is still a living factor in our time.<sup>91</sup>

Aside from its incredulity, Reuss's claim reflects his reliance on repressed and subsequently forgotten ancient history to justify his revisionist approach to Gnosticism and its propagation across the entire modern West. In spite of the suspicion of the uninitiated, Kellner and Reuss sought to sacralize exoterically the already esoteric practices in the Western mysticism by imbuing their rites, rituals, and literature with a symbolism that utilized both the sacred and the profane—a method akin to alchemical transmutation itself.

Kellner and Reuss emphasized to their initiates that the sexual practices of the O.T.O. were opposed to carnal indulgence. For Reuss, the proliferation of the order's synthesis of Tantra practices and alchemical wisdom would mark the spiritual rejuvenation of Western modernism. To support his case for this degeneration, he chagrined at the rampant undercurrents of Viennese society, where pornography and prostitution undermined and distracted from the healthier, self-conscious sacraments of sex magic, which, long practiced by Hindus, found its Western counterpart in the cryptic teachings of the Gnostics.<sup>92</sup> Preserved in such writings as *The Alchemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreuz* by the Rosicrucians, the Freemasons, and Hermetic orders for centuries, the lineage of the O.T.O. was straightaway linked to Hellenistic Gnosticism, which found its epitome in the mystery cult of Christianity. Thus, the O.T.O. was the cure, not a virus, of Western spirituality. As Reuss lyrically proclaimed in *Oriflamme*, the official journal of

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<sup>91</sup> Cited in Urban 100.

<sup>92</sup> Urban 100-101.

the O.T.O.: “‘The Light of the East,’ despite all fog, has emerged victorious!”<sup>93</sup>

But, following the death of Kellner in 1905, the O.T.O. soon underwent a great schism. In 1912, when Reuss became acquainted with the renowned Aleister Crowley, a British occultist who believed himself the reincarnation of the mid-nineteenth-century French ceremonial magician, Eliphas Lévi.<sup>94</sup> After their introduction, a sort of mutual initiation took place. While Reuss convinced Crowley of the power of O.T.O. sex magic, Crowley introduced Reuss to his own Aeonic Law of Thelema, based on Crowley’s purported revelation during vacation to Egypt in 1904.<sup>95</sup> This doctrine—and its highest law: “Do what thou wilt”—interfered with the restraint demanded by the O.T.O. While Reuss was primarily interested in the physiological aspects of Tantra, Crowley showed himself to care little about the therapeutic implications behind his mentor’s references in sex magic, though his own literature demonstrates he certainly comprehended their alchemical symbolism.<sup>96</sup> In 1922, after Reuss resigned from the O.T.O. for health reasons, Crowley succeeded him as the Outer Head of the Order. Soon, numerous chapters in Germany and Austria disbanded from the order when Crowley, governing from Britain, imposed his Law of Thelema onto the original doctrines, neglected to translate his works into German, and then disclosed secrets about sex magic prematurely to neophyte members of the society.<sup>97</sup>

### *The Anthroposophical Society*

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<sup>93</sup> Cited in Urban 96.

<sup>94</sup> Contemporaries admired both Reuss and Crowley for their charisma and genius and distained them for their charlatanism and malevolence. In addition to their personal characteristics, the two occultists, having been admitted into multiple secret societies, professed to fuse Western alchemical and Tantric traditions in their own spiritual disciplines. Dvorak. Urban 96-97.

<sup>95</sup> Owen 212-213.

<sup>96</sup> Flowers 10.

<sup>97</sup> Flowers 10-12.

Although not formalized until 1913, Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophical Society was an occult order whose tenets took some ten years to break fully from the Theosophical Society. As opposed to *Theosophy*, which focused on the knowledge of God or the gods, the Anthroposophical Society was chiefly devoted, as the prefix *anthro-* suggests, to cultivating knowledge of the true being of *man*. Accordingly, Steiner defined Anthroposophy as “a path of knowledge to lead the spiritual in the individual to the spiritual in the universe.”<sup>98</sup> The simplicity and succinctness of this definition rightfully convey its founder’s approach to the occult cosmology as an egalitarian, practical, and accessible venue that was applicable in a modern lifestyle. While the hierarchical levels of the Anthroposophical Society offered increasingly complex, and secretive, teachings about the nature of man and his relation to the cosmos, Steiner devised its basic tenets as a project that appealed to the scientific method on the one hand and to convincing others of the existential reality of the spiritual world on the other.<sup>99</sup>

Before his discovery of Anthroposophy, Steiner had come to the Viennese chapter of the Theosophical Society in 1899 after an unsuccessful attempt to find a Christian church with a dogma compatible with his own lifelong clairvoyant experiences. Composing his magnum opus *The Philosophy of Freedom* in 1894, Steiner’s intellectual background in the anarchistic ideas of Stirner, Ernst Haeckel’s spiritualized monism, Goethe’s thought, Fichte’s philosophy of the “I,” and the revolutionary writings of Nietzsche differed from most Theosophists in Germany and Austria.<sup>100</sup> This led him to two prominent figures in the Theosophical Society. The first was none other than Franz Hartmann, whose

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<sup>98</sup> Rudolf Steiner, Robert A. McDermott, ed. *The Essential Rudolf Steiner: Basic Writings of Rudolf Steiner* (London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1984): 415.

<sup>99</sup> See Treitel 97.

<sup>100</sup> Egmond 332-333. Treitel 98.

emphasis on the importance of personal occult experiences frequently surfaced in his hostility to spiritual authorities in organized religion. Steiner's individualized approach to metaphysics resembled Hartmann's belief that "[e]ach man has his guru and his savior in himself, and an external leader serves only to show the way by which to find his inner guru." This assertion may seem contradictory given Hartmann's allegiance to Blavatsky at the time, but Hartmann always encouraged Theosophists to focus on the society's purpose "to induce the people to study the higher laws of life, to raise them up to a higher conception of eternal truth, and teach them to do their own thinking."<sup>101</sup>

Steiner was also influenced by the scientific method of Wilhelm von Hübbe-Schleiden, a German lawyer whose own life in India during the 1890s led him first to become an imperial propagandist and then, suddenly, a Theosophist. Altogether abandoning colonial politics, Hübbe-Schleiden indicated that his radical transition resulted from a call to universal brotherhood.<sup>102</sup> Steiner would later echo the ex-imperialist's emphasis on universal brotherhood, but he was especially taken by his emphasis on the application of the scientific method. In addition to his work with in Theosophy, Hübbe-Schleiden was the co-founder of the Munich-based *Psychologische Gesellschaft* (Psychological Society) and editor of its journal *Der Sphinx*. Chartered by some fifty scientists, psychologists, physicians, and intellectuals in 1886, the Psychological Society and its journal were among the earliest formal attempts in German-

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<sup>101</sup> In spite of Hartmann's recurring fight against what he considered the threat of individual salvation and self-knowledge within the Theosophical Society, he indeed respected Blavatsky and other members of the organization—even one Hindu shaman Blavatsky claimed to channel telepathically in her mediumistic sittings, whose influence he claimed “pervaded my whole being and filled me with a sensation of indescribable bliss which lasted for several days.” See Treitel 95–96.

<sup>102</sup> In hindsight, Hübbe-Schleiden has been brandished as the primary author of the ideology of “social imperialism” and a forerunner in German illiberalism. However, Treitel shows that this assessment is largely unfair, since it takes into account Hübbe-Schleiden’s eleven years as a propagandist but not his more than three decades as a Theosophist. See esp. Treitel 86–88.

speaking Europe to investigate occult phenomena in a scientific environment while excluding those not concerned with objective experimentation.<sup>103</sup> Steiner himself marveled at Hübbe-Schleiden's methodology when, during a visit to his home around 1900, he found his host's apartment full of elaborate wire contraptions. On closer inspection, Steiner realized that they were in fact model chains of the molecules in their physical and transdimensional configurations—one of Hübbe-Schleiden's many graphic representations of the transcendental universe.<sup>104</sup>

In his own spiritual investigations, Steiner's primary interest in scholarly research lay in disciplines dealing with the human experience, viz. history and philology. Quickly rising to the general secretary of the German section in 1902,<sup>105</sup> Steiner gave his first full lecture cycle, entitled *Christianity as Mystical Fact*. In it, he posited the philosophical genealogy of Christianity lay not in the Jewish tradition but primarily in the mystery schools of Egypt and Greece, where for centuries spiritual seekers travelled to be initiated into the mastery of their physical and mental faculties, which would enable them to overcome the grip of temporality and consequently grant them firsthand experience of their spiritual existence. Among these initiates were Pericles, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and even Odysseus, whose serious training and subsequent self-discipline had given them profound insight into the true nature of the universe. In his examination of the linguistic emphasis on dualism, light, and miracles in the Gospel of St. John, the

<sup>103</sup> Treitel 42-43.

<sup>104</sup> Treitel 92. Both Hartmann and Hübbe-Schleiden proved immensely influential for Steiner's teachings. Their interests in self-focused occultism and the scientific method was balanced by their mutual laments that many Theosophists had forgotten the society's mission of universal brotherhood. In one particularly scathing reference to this tendency to dwell excessively on the subgoals of comparative study and occult research, Hartmann dismissed those who pursued the former as reaching for "lots of useless knowledge" (*Vielwisserei*) and the latter after "excessive enthusiasm" (*Schwämerei*). This shared dissatisfaction with bourgeois dilettantism would likewise lead Steiner to abandon the Theosophical Society altogether and begin a vocation for "a public activity on behalf of spiritual knowledge" (See Treitel 99).

<sup>105</sup> Treitel 99-100.

Book of Revelation, and other writings of the New Testament, Steiner inferred that their authors also became familiar with this same mystery knowledge through the teachings of their own spiritual master, Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>106</sup>

Steiner also maintained that Gnosticism was central to understanding Christianity in its truest sense. Surveying the various bodies of research on Gnostic Christianity—from the German historian Adolf Harnack to the English mystic G.R.S. Mead—he stated:

The essential point common to them all [sects of Gnostic-Christians] was that to arrive at a true understanding of the Christ-idea, mere historical tradition was not sufficient, but that it must be sought either in the wisdom of the Mysteries or in the Neoplatonic philosophy which was derived from the same source. The Gnostics had faith in human wisdom, and believed it capable of bringing forth a Christ by whom the historical Christ could be measured. In fact, through the former alone could the latter be understood and beheld in the right light.<sup>107</sup>

Christianity in its truest form, Steiner asserted, sprang from Gnosticism.

Steiner did not, however, regard Egypt as the cradle of self-knowledge and Gnosticism. Based on personal revelation and intense study of Theosophical and ancient texts, Steiner taught that throughout the centuries ancient wisdom thrived across the globe in mostly forgotten epochs. Eons ago, the creative forces of the cosmos visited humanity during the Polarean, the Hyperborean, the Lemurian, and the Atlantean epochs. In our own time, the Post-Atlantean Epoch, the highpoint of this symbiosis between matter and spirit culminated in the incarnation of Christ. For millennia before Him, the priesthoods of technologically advanced cultures such as Babylon, Persia, and India preserved and elucidated what fragments of “spiritual science” (primordial wisdom) they

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<sup>106</sup> It is noteworthy that Steiner does not undermine Judaism and its influence on early Christianity. The Jewish tradition, Steiner indicates, was a tremendous source of Christianity’s understanding of human history, divine-human dialogue, and its moral system. However, it is from the Egyptian-Greek synthesis that the religion inherited its mystery center and the transformation of the soul which enables the individual to have firsthand spiritual knowledge. See esp. “Chapter VII: The Gospels” and “Chapter IX: The Apocalypse of St. John” in Steiner, H. Collison ed., *Christianity as Mystical Fact: And the Mysteries of Antiquity* (Third Edition) (London: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1914): 147-158; 177-198.

<sup>107</sup> Steiner, “The Essence of Christianity” in *Christianity as Mystical Fact* 208-209.

had acquired from the Atlanteans. However, this wisdom appeared obtuse and cryptic to Post-Atlanteans since humans in the previous epoch were hermaphroditic and thus possessed sense perception unknown to present-day humans.<sup>108</sup> The latter centuries of our epoch, then, mark a lull in man's spirituality as he furthers his mastery over matter. In the upcoming Sixth Great and Seventh Great epochs, the body will continue to evolve in a process analogous to the spiritual evolution of the psyche.<sup>109</sup> Humans thus will accrue the cognitive and corporeal faculties to achieve the age-old mission of the Gnostics: total self-knowledge.

As evidenced in his lectures from 1902 until his death in 1925, Steiner kept himself informed on anthropological and archaeological research, whose discoveries he found relevant to understanding more fully the implications of ancient wisdom. Consequently, Steiner's writings reveal that, perhaps more than the O.T.O. and other Gnostic orders, the Anthroposophical Society encouraged its adherents to educate themselves on the spiritual mysteries reemerging from the ancient world. Steiner was well read on premier classicists and orientalists in Germany, Austria, and England.<sup>110</sup> In fact, Steiner mentioned the research of Arthur Drews in no fewer than eleven lectures between 1903 and 1919.<sup>111</sup> But Steiner's interests in the radical findings of orientalists and their

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<sup>108</sup> For a discussion about these cultural epochs and Steiner's commentary about their investigation by psychical researchers in the early twentieth century, see Steiner, "Lecture I: May 29, 1917" in *Aspects of Human Evolution* 1-12.

<sup>109</sup> For a discussion on what Steiner calls the major "cultures" (i.e., civilizations) of the Atlantean Epoch, see Steiner "Lecture I: Spiritual Connections between the Culture-Streams of Ancient and Modern Times, September 2, 1908," in Norman Macbeth, trans. *Egyptian Myths and Mysteries* (Spring Valley, NY: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1971): 4-9.

<sup>110</sup> Notes from one lecture are particularly telling with regard to Steiner's status as an autodidact and critic. See Steiner, *Building Stones* 159, n. 3.

<sup>111</sup> Rudolf Steiner, (See "Part V: The Epistemological Basis of Theosophy I") *Spirituelle Seelenlehre und Weltbetrachtung: 18 öffentliche Vorträge* (Dornach: Rudolf-Steiner Verlag, 1972): 90-91; Steiner, „Das Wesen der Geistigen Krisis des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts,“ (Dornach, 5. Mai 1910) *Drei Perspektiven der Anthroposophie: Kulturphaenomene, Geisteswissenschaftlich Betrachtet; Zwölf Vorträge, gehalten in Dornach zwischen dem 5. Mai und 23. September 1923* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1990): 21; Steiner, Pauline Wehre, trans. "Lecture V: The 'I' is Found on the Physical Plane in Acts of Will, aka Science, Dreaming of the Soul, and the Intoxication of Religion," from *Necessity and Freedom: Five Lectures given in Berlin between January 25 and February 8, 1916* (London: The Anthroposophic Press, 1988): 110; Steiner, A.H. Parker, trans. "Lecture VII: Building Stones," from

advocates did not mean that he blindly accepted their scholarly assessments. He was particularly critical of the theories of Drews for nearly five years leading up to the publication of *The Christ Myth*, and especially after the historian's first controversial debate in January 1910, which Steiner himself apparently attended.<sup>112</sup>

Ultimately, Steiner denounced any theory that totally denied the historicity of Jesus. This was because, for Anthroposophy—based largely on an amalgamation of Rosicrucianism and mystical Masonic ideas—a historical Jesus was necessary in understanding the very real rapport which mankind in the material plane possessed with the undetected dominance of the spiritual plane pervading the universe.<sup>113</sup> The consciousness behind these powers, according to Steiner, emanated from what Western religious traditions called God, which, existing independently outside the bounds of time and space, had intercepted the cosmos in the form of Jesus as a testimony of the eternal evolutionary union between mankind and divinity.<sup>114</sup> Despite these criticisms, seven months after the first Christ Myth debate, Steiner admitted that Drews's thorough investigation of the arcane Gnostic symbolism behind the Gospels was praiseworthy and

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*Building Stones for an Understanding of the Mystery of Golgotha: Lectures given in Berlin from 27<sup>th</sup> March to 8<sup>th</sup> May, 1917.* Second edition (London: The Rudolf Steiner Press, 1972): 154-155; Steiner, Ritz Stebbing, trans. "Lecture III: Human Development, the Contemporary Spirit of Science," from *Aspects of Human Evolution* (London: The Anthroposophic Press, 1987): see esp. 40-44; Steiner, Anonymous, trans. "Lecture II: Michael's Battle and its Reflection on Earth," from *The Mission of the Archangel Michael: Eight Lectures Delivered in 1918 and 1919* (New York, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1961): 149.

<sup>112</sup> For evidence that Steiner attended the first Christ Myth debate, see Steiner, Harry Collison, ed. Anonymous, trans. "Lecture IX: The Initiation of the Ego," from *The Gospel of St. Matthew* (London: The Rudolf Steiner Press, 1935) (9 September 1910): 190.

<sup>113</sup> For the influence of Rosicrucianism and mystical Freemasonry, see Egmond 332-333.

<sup>114</sup> "In the first post-Atlantean culture it was the Rishis who brought the sublime teaching that led men into lofty spiritual worlds, even into the world of higher Devachan. In the succeeding cultural periods, what was seen there was led down as far as the physical plane. Until the fourth post-Atlantean period there continued to descend into the physical plane that Being whom we learned to know as Brahman in the Indian period and whom we now designate as Christ. No longer does he transmit the spiritual; he himself became man in order to radiate over all men the mysterious power of the primal Word./ Thus the primal Word descended, in order that it might lead man upward again." See Egyptian Myths and Mysteries 31.

significant for understanding the occult quality of Christian Scripture.<sup>115</sup>

Personal convictions aside, such robust assertions about the ahistoricity of Jesus impressed Steiner no more than mainstream scholars such as Troeltsch and Harnack on grounds of scientific reasoning. Most significantly, Steiner noted, the arguments of Drews and his advocates were no better than those of the fourth-century Roman Emperor Julian. The irreverent successor to Constantine, Julian wished to abolish Christianity from its newly acquired position as the state religion of the empire. As Steiner observed:

And when we compare these arguments with the objections raised by the liberal theology of the nineteenth century and the later theology of the adherents of Drews against the historicity of Christ, when we consider the whole field of literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which reveals most careful, painstaking and thorough philological investigation, there are endless repetitions, so that one has to consult whole libraries—we find that we can piece together certain guiding principles. The leading critics began to undertake a comparative study of the Gospels and found many discrepancies in the texts. But all these critical methods were already anticipated by Julian. The nineteenth-century criticism offered nothing new that was not already known to Julian. Julian spoke out of a natural creative gift whilst the nineteenth-century criticism displayed enormous industry, great erudition and downright theological sophistry.<sup>116</sup>

For Steiner, there was nothing unique or new about the Christ Myth, or for that matter, post-Enlightenment scholarship. Compared to Gnostics in the vein of the Anthroposophists, it would seem that intellectuals were late on the scene regarding an ahistorical Jesus.

In addition to his critique of modern intellectualism, Steiner was significantly responsible for the dissemination of Hellenistic Gnostic philosophies to the German-speaking public. In Berlin on 11 November 1904, for example, Steiner gave his first lecture on Manicheism. In it, he explicated a biographical sketch of its founder Mani, the

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<sup>115</sup> Steiner, *The Gospel of St. Matthew* 191; see also 188-190.

<sup>116</sup> Steiner, *Building Stones* 154-155.

legend of Manicheanism as a Gnostic sect, the Manichean interpretation of evil as unseasonable good, and the relevance of Manicheanism within the modern occult movement. Most significantly in this lecture, Steiner explained the Manichean principle of man's spiritual enlightenment, which he characteristically called "Faustus," casting this self-disciplined mysticism in opposition to the principle of external authority, which he associated with St. Augustine and, particularly, the legacy of mainstream Protestantism.<sup>117</sup>

Steiner's renown attracted numerous contemporaries from other strains of Western mysticism, especially Rosicrucianism. Perhaps the most notable of these mystics was the Danish-American engineer and adept Max Heindel, whose complex "cosmo-conception" cobbled together science and spirituality with the cosmogony and anthropogony of Rosicrucianism.<sup>118</sup> An influential occult philosopher in German-speaking Europe, Heindel dedicated his seminal *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception* (1909) to his "esteemed teacher and valued friend, Dr. Rudolf Steiner."<sup>119</sup> This admiration was mutual. Three years before writing his *magnum opus*, the engineer had embarked on a spiritual sojourn throughout Europe that, in November 1907, led him to the enigmatic Steiner. At that time, Steiner, still the Arch Warden of the Theosophical Society at Berlin, had propounded the tenets of Anthroposophy, based largely on his personal visions of the origins and destiny of mankind, and had begun initiating students,

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<sup>117</sup> See Steiner, "Manicheism" in *The Temple Legend: Freemasonry & Related Occult Movements: Twenty Lectures given in Berlin between 23<sup>rd</sup> May and the 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1906* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1985); see esp. 64.

<sup>118</sup> Heindel first propounded his theory sometime during or before the first decade of the Great War (e.g. *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception*), but did not publish his teachings extensively until later (see Heindel, "Lecture XIII: The Angels as Factors in Evolution," in *Rosicrucian Christianity* 209-225).

<sup>119</sup> Heindel's dedication and credit to Steiner does not appear in the fifteenth edition of the *Cosmo-Conception* cited in this study, but the original English typescript (1908) and the first (1909) and second (1910) editions divulged lengthy appreciation to Steiner for imparting his occult knowledge to the Rosicrucian. See discussion in Ger Westenberg, Elizabeth C. Ray, trans. *Max Heindel and the Rosicrucian Fellowship* (Madison, WI: The Rosicrucian Fellowship Publishing Co., 2009/2010): 66-67.

including Heindel, into this “Esoteric School.”<sup>120</sup> Sharing Heindel’s profound respect for the ancient occult traditions behind Christian mythologies, Steiner incorporated into the Esoteric School a wealth of Rosicrucian knowledge that, long after Heindel had departed Germany, informed the basis of Anthroposophy.<sup>121</sup>

Steiner’s Esoteric School provided the basis for the higher mysteries of what would become the Anthroposophical Society. Along with her husband, the Dutch-German Theosophist Johanna van der Meulen was among the first leaders of Steiner’s school. After her initiation into the society in 1911, van der Meulen began writing philosophical occult treatises which, steeped in a mixture of allegory, mythology, and symbolism, laid out the esoteric Christian conception behind the recreation and destiny of the cosmos. Charged with references to the new discoveries about ancient heterodox Christian cults like the Ophites and Basilideans and associating their teachings with the Bogomils and Cathars in medieval Europe, van der Meulen’s works heaved with a mystical worldview bolstered by the revival of Gnosticism.<sup>122</sup> By explicating the tenants of ancient Gnostic sects and condoning their mystical worldviews as antithetical to religious orthodoxy,

<sup>120</sup> Steiner originally published the teachings of his Esoteric School in a seven-book series. See Westenberg 59-60.

<sup>121</sup> While initiating Heindel into his Esoteric School, Steiner seems to have thought that the Rosicrucian would promulgate the teachings of Anthroposophy in the United States, since Heindel had connections with the Theosophical Society in Los Angeles, California. But after leaving Germany in March 1908, Heindel, though a high-ranking member in the Steiner’s brotherhood, maintained limited conversation with Steiner. This estrangement would lead to antagonism between the two mystics. Though when officially founding the Anthroposophical Society on 2 February 1913, Steiner declared his movement “a much broader area includes [sic] than that of the Rosicrucians, videlicet that of the whole Theosophy,” the details of its cosmogony and anthropogony did not stray far from the occult knowledge that, as Heindel expressed in 1909, had already found its germ in the earliest tenets of the Rosicrucian Society. See Westenberg 67-68.

<sup>122</sup> Little is known about van der Meulen’s involvement in the occult and alternative spiritualties outside her literature, which was mostly written after her initiation into the Anthroposophical Society. At present it is only known that in 1909 she transferred her membership from the Dutch to the German section of the Theosophical Society. In addition to her involvement in Anthroposophy, she is said to have been an ardent disciple of Rudolf Steiner. She converted to Catholicism in the 1930s, which should come as no surprise, given the strong parallels between her occult writings and the Catholic tradition in hagiographic and scriptural interpretation. Gerhard Wehr, „Johanna van der Meulen“, *Forschungsstelle Kulturimpuls: Biographien Dokumentation* (accessed 18 May 2014, URL: [kulturimpuls.org](http://kulturimpuls.org)). Popular throughout the 1920s, her documents are included in this study because her attempts to trace a Gnostic spiritual heritage in Western esoterica through the ancient Holy Lands to medieval and early modern Europe parallel and are indicative of other leaders of esoteric schools.

Steiner and his closest associates quite explicitly promulgated discoveries such as the Turfan texts in order to bolster Anthroposophy, a spiritual path that, in spirit of Gnosticism, rung with the security of ancient wisdom yet appeared refreshingly modern with its emphasis on individual salvation and the cultivation of creative talents.

#### THE APPLICABILITY OF GNOSTICISM IN MODERNITY

Because contemporary scholarship seemed to confirm their cause, mystics and mediums like Kellner and Steiner had seemingly accomplished the dual mission sought-after by the modern occult movement. First, they rejected the bleak materialism of science and the elite clericalism of religion; second, they staked a distinctly holistic authority in both science and religion by affirming their respective appeals to dispassionate objectivity on the one hand and transcendental subjectivity on the other. Dynamic in its intellectual and spiritual appeal, the Gnostic revival flowed outward into both the counter-culture and the avant-garde philosophy of *fin-de-siècle* society through the Ordo Templi Orientis and the Anthroposophical Society as well as burgeoning branches of academia such as Assyriology and Indology. Of course, there were enormous differences between these rising schools of thought. But in anti-classicism, in the search to find a new spirituality beyond the Bible, and in the quest to give the German nation autonomous and secure cultural foundations, they shared a common set of enmities and an inclination to fight occidentalist traditions with long-lost “oriental” truths.<sup>123</sup>

Unlike Blavatsky, who referred to her “secret doctrine,”<sup>124</sup> these men explicitly appealed to Gnosticism to describe the knowledge they offered to a spiritually

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<sup>123</sup> Marchand makes a similar distinction between Germany’s philosophical avant-garde and counter-culture spirituality (470).

<sup>124</sup> For information regarding Blavatsky’s secret doctrine and its significance in Theosophy, see Owen 32-34.

impoverished Europe. To what extent the scholarly controversy concerning Gnosticism drove their campaign for an expressly Western Gnosticism requires further research, but it is remarkable that their approach to this philosophy between the 1870s and 1890s differed little from their intellectual contemporaries in the 1900s. Though Hartmann, Kellner, and Steiner were initially drawn to Theosophy because of their interest in the ancient Orient, they would offer new alternatives for transcendence not so much a replacement of Western spirituality but a radical reinterpretation of its entire religious lexicon—symbols, iconography, and myths—as something far more esoteric than previously imagined. While their interests in the spiritual sciences extended to the years before the twentieth century, before the Great War these three men would formalize their teachings by establishing two associations that until the 1933 would remain most influential to the Gnostic revival in German-speaking Europe.

The entanglement of the esoteric and the secular perspectives of the ancient Orient, the occult sciences, and Gnosticism was particularly a concern for younger German scholars who wanted to dissociate their research from the dubious avant-garde spiritualities of the nineteenth century. As they weighed new incoming evidence with previous sources, these students excavated the hidden history of ancient Gnostic traditions with a self-conscious rejection of its revival in secret brotherhoods and spiritual societies. Before his noted career in philosophy and history, Gershom Scholem began his rigorous philological analysis of the Kabbalah in 1919 for two reasons. In part, he aimed to rehabilitate this secret sect of Judaism from the Enlightenment-inspired contempt of Heinrich Graetz and other mainstream Jewish historiographers whose rational biases repressed the mystical and subversive tradition in their thrust toward progress, reform,

and assimilation of Judaism into Christian-European civilization. In addition, Scholem wanted to reclaim Kabbalah from the magical doctrines propagated by Eliphas Lévi, Aleister Crowley, and other leaders of the contemporary occult movement.<sup>125</sup>

In the introduction to his own 1910 doctoral dissertation entitled *Dokumente der Gnosis* (Documents of Gnosis), Wolfgang Schultz took pains to dissuade his audience from comparing the Gnostic heritage from Babylon and Greece with their modern counterparts, the Theosophists. Distancing his research from the movement's agenda, he reprimanded its adherents for their crude and hasty approach to the “mystical philosophy of consciousness” inherent in Gnosticism. In blatant disregard for the stringent discipline entailed in the rites and ceremonies instituted by their predecessors, the Theosophists, according to Schultz, only busied themselves “with sultry heads and impetuous hearts.”<sup>126</sup> But whereas Schultz chastised the Theosophists, he eulogized their predecessors:

Precisely because even the best among the modern Theosophists are missing that which the Gnostics of the emerging Church so terribly endured, they [the early Christians] are still able to captivate us today—namely that primal force, that impetuosity of thought, that shamelessness in the face of the consequences, that contempt of all barriers, that outrage against the established law, that moral earnestness, that insatiable, panting thirst for knowledge, that ember of emotions, that chill of performance, all whose permanence in the confused flood leaves the later spectator with a sublime impression.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Grimstad 66-67.

<sup>126</sup> Schultz suggests, too, that the disproportionately high involvement of women in Theosophy demonstrates that its members were ignorant that Gnosticism was originally almost exclusively male. Schultz iv, vi.

<sup>127</sup> Original in context: „Doch obgleich der Gnostiker des Altertums eine nicht minder große Schar war, deren Mehrzahl nach einem unumstößlichen Gesetze menschlicher Unvollkommenheit aus gewöhnlichen, höchst klageliehen, nur vorübergehend geläuterten, oder auch dauernd verderbten Menschen bestehen mußte, so war doch der Abstand zwischen diesen Gemeinden und ihren führenden Köpfen oder gar Begründern sicherlich ein ungleich größerer als er sich heute irgendwo beobachten läßt, wodurch allerdings auch der Glanz dieser Größen um so deutlicher hervor leuchtet. Denn selbst den besten unter den modernen Theosophen fehlt gerade das, wodurch die Gnostiker der aufstrebenden Kirche so furchtbar wurden und wodurch sie heute noch uns fesseln, nämlich jene ursprüngliche Kraft, jenes Ungestüm des Gedankens, jene Schamlosigkeit in den Folgerungen, jene Verachtung aller Schranken, jene Gewalttätigkeit gegen Bestehendes, jener sittliche Ernst, jene unersättlich lechzende Gier nach Erkenntnis, jene Glut der Gefühle, jene Kälte der Darstellung, deren ständiges durch einander Fluten in den gnostischen Systemen auch noch dem späteren Beschauer einen einzig erhabenen Eindruck hinterläßt.“ Schultz vi-vii.

In contrast to the Theosophists, whose greatest commonality proved “their defectiveness as they feel, talk, think, and write past one another,” Schultz viewed the secretive unity of the ancient Gnostics—especially the second-century Christians ostracized by the followers of Tertullian, Origen, and other polemists—as a noble accomplishment of the human spirit likely to remain unmatched by posterity.<sup>128</sup>

The examples of Scholem and Schultz exemplify how aspiring scholars dealt with the tension between the cultural revival of Gnosticism and the scholarly criticism toward religiosity. On the one hand they attempted to sanitize Gnosticism of its apparently misinformed popular fantasies rampant across early twentieth-century Europe. In this way, their comments reveal the threat that certain Gnostics imitating the scholarly discourse posed by latching onto scientific research to bolster their own interpretations of Gnostic philosophy. Despite their criticism of the Gnostic revival, they also suggest that, given the Western fascination with the alleged spiritual heritage of the Orient, it is no wonder that a twentieth-century affinity for Gnosticism flourished. On the other hand, these young scholars sought to eject the scholarly investigation of Gnosticism from its outright skepticism toward the intrinsic efficacy of religious traditions, suggesting that their superiors had become too complacent in their materialist approach to the mystical experience by treating it as something readily understood through cool objectivity and analytical distance.

But counter-cultural mysticism was by no means entirely shunned by scholars during the first decade of the century. Rather, a conviction of the intrinsic efficacy of Gnosticism had arisen within the research of Andrej Niemojewski, Gerard Bolland, and

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<sup>128</sup> See his commentary on the Church Fathers as sources for the teachings of Gnosticism, esp. Schultz ixx-xxviii.

Arthur Drews. These were scholars who, in the course of their own studies, had become convinced that, in order to reconcile religion with industrial modernism, the dogmatism and doctrine of orthodox Christianity must have the most recent archeological and philological evidence thrust upon them in the promulgation of Gnosticism itself. Much like their occultist contemporaries, they philosophized about the applicability of mystical philosophy which, focused on the individual's esoteric quest for self-salvation and private expression, fit so neatly an industrial society guided by scientific investigation that deemed no truth universal, and no human psyche beyond investigation.

This advocacy of mysticism may sound contradictory, given their tirades against the inherently divine inspiration behind Christian scriptures and the legitimacy of religious authority. But the robust rhetoric and writings of Drews, Niemojewski, and Bolland show that they felt their objective research would bring the general public to terms with reality. This reconciliation included, first, the recognition of the unoriginality of early Christianity as a religious sect founded by Gnostics whose numinous cosmology reigned in every dominant ancient civilization, and, secondly, the formalization of Gnosticism, or at least a mysticism akin to its worldview, as an expressly up-to-date revision of religiosity combatable with twentieth-century modernism and Western civilization.

For these scholars, the revival of Gnosticism was doubtlessly nothing short of radical. Pulling heavily from Hegelian philosophy that had become popular in the Netherlands at the turn of the century, Bolland defined himself a “mystic” and a “desperate skeptical agnostic.”<sup>129</sup> He continued Bruno Bauer’s “concepts about Philo, the Caesars, and their

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<sup>129</sup> According to the personal account of a contemporary, his initial exposure to Hegel threw him into a reflective sort of spiritual experience that lasted two days, and Bolland himself later claimed to have grasped everything the totality of Hegel's writings within a matter of two weeks. Implementing his own conception of pure reason into his interpretation of the origins of Christianity, Bolland asserted that reason, which had become conscious of itself, was

influence” on the development of early Christianity, concluding that the basis for Christianity developed among strongly syncretized, Hellenized Jews in Alexandria and Judeophile Greeks in the early first- and second century AD. By restructuring Christianity according to the Hellenistic mystery religions, Bolland claimed, Europe could reestablish a religion based on enlightened idealism.<sup>130</sup> Niemojewski took a less refined route to revive Gnosticism in Europe. In addition to his imprisonment in 1899 and 1911 for “blasphemy” in his books on religion and Gnosticism, Niemojewski translated the works of Ernest Renan into Polish and edited the journal *Independent Thought* between 1906 and 1921. In addition to his easy-to-read tracts defaming conventional scholarship and organized religion’s perspectives on Gnosticism and occult sciences, Niemojewski published socially engaged poetry and novels marked by a relentless support of women’s suffrage, redistribution of wealth, and other egalitarian ideals.<sup>131</sup>

Though a minority in their agenda to achieve an aggregate religious community based on the worldview on Gnosticism, these scholars felt themselves part of a larger demographic of irrepressible scholars including Edwin Johnson in England, Emilio Bossi in Italy, and numerous other Pan-Babylonians and Orientalists over-confident that their

the exclusive expression of the absolute truth that can be derived from transmitted written texts such as the Gospels. This is why pure reason has the absolute character absent in other philosophical systems, which have to be regarded, according to Bolland, merely as single opinions devoid of any claim to constitute truth. In his view, although most people have opinions, he himself was in the possession of “the certainty of the Notion.” While his philosophical commentary on the origins of Christianity is noted to have enjoyed wide popularity among Dutch scholars, Bolland’s penchant to dogmatize his own “mystical enlightenment” made philosophical debate impossible. Harco Rutgers, “Dutch Hegelianism: The Cement of Social Life,” Rotterdam (1994): accessed 23 August 2014:

[[http://www.siebethissen.net/Wijsbegeerte\\_in\\_Nederland/1994\\_Dutch\\_Hegelianism\\_\(english\).htm](http://www.siebethissen.net/Wijsbegeerte_in_Nederland/1994_Dutch_Hegelianism_(english).htm)].

<sup>130</sup> Among the influences in these theosophical circles were Gnosticism and Hermeticism, which influenced early Christian beliefs revolving around a mythical Chrestos figure, a Greco-Roman, not messianic, figure of late antiquity. Philo’s texts, according to Bolland, were also a step in this development, especially the concept of the Logos. Drews, *Die Leugnung* 67-68, see also 43-44. As upcoming chapters will discuss, the “Chrestos” archetype from Gnosticism became central to various esoteric schools during the *fin de siècle* and the postwar era.

<sup>131</sup> Niemojewski’s best known novel is *People of the Revolution* (1906). See Bill Cooke, *Dictionary of Atheism, Skepticism, & Humanism* (New York, NY: Prometheus Books, 2006): 366-367.

research would turn the Western worldview permanently on its head. That modern scholarship had simultaneously proven traditional religion bogus and fanned the revival of Gnosticism was both paradoxical and timely.

The reason that Drews ridiculed the *personality* of Jesus was simply because he found his historicity doctrinally unnecessary until the rise of liberal Protestantism. Itself a product of the Enlightenment, liberal Protestantism swept Germany during the course of the nineteenth century in its appeal to a historical Jesus as a personal Lord and Savior. Much to Drews's chagrin, the scholarly formation of religious criticism, stocked with Protestant theologians, framed their questions about the Christian canon in historicist terms.<sup>132</sup> Raging against the skepticism of esteemed colleagues like Harnack and Troelstch, in 1911 Drews declared that philosophical monism should usurp literalized interpretations of scripture in favor of their original, intended esoteric significance:

The chief danger that has come in our time, especially to religion, under the influence of science is the denial of objective purpose in the universe. Let men be taught to believe again in ideas, and then Monism, in its idealistic form, will become the first principle of all religious life. [...] [I]t is the *idea* that attains consciousness in such men and stirs them to action; they are what they are only by the living power of the divinity within them. In this sense it is true that in the last resort ideas, not personalities, rule the world [...]. We see how this idea created the religions of Attis, Adonis, Osiris, Dionysus, and similar gods [...]. It is said that purely ideal religion of this kind cannot satisfy the religious needs of humanity without historical guarantees of its truth. But it *has* satisfied immense numbers—even setting aside India, where idealistic Monism forms the nucleus of all religious life—in the mysticism and piety of Eckehart and Tauler, in that humble and self-sacrificing surrender to the all [...]; it has survived in the best minds of Germany—Lessing, Herder, Goethe, Schiller, Hegel, etc.<sup>133</sup>

Appealing to Eastern religiosity and Western mysticism, Drews made clear that

<sup>132</sup> Drews states: "Much zeal is shown against materialism; as if it were not just as crude materialism to make the belief in religious truth dependent on its visible realization in a single human individual in ancient times, and as if what is called the 'ideal Christ,' the working of the divine spirit in us, the one source and center of all religious life, could be replaced and vanquished by a belief in a historical Jesus." See Drews, Joseph McCabe, trans. *The Witnesses to the Historicity of Jesus* (London: Watts & Co., 1912): 303.

<sup>133</sup> Drews, *Witnesses of the Historicity* 302-303. Emphasis in the original. See also 296-301.

materially-minded scholars, despite their good intentions, were inadvertently killing the mystical worldview of Monism, whose deepest aspirations, integrally linked to Gnosticism, had allowed the rise of not just Christian religion but the best of German poets and thinkers.<sup>134</sup>

On the surface, the campaigns that Drews, Niemojewski, and Bolland issued against exoteric Christianity appear nothing more than the work of cynical, atheistic scholars bent on discrediting the legacy of Christendom and Western civilization. Indeed, they were self-professed non-believers. But Drews, Niemojewski, Bolland, and their followers shared a more complex agenda than immediately understood by those innocent of learning.<sup>135</sup> What mattered to them was the idea of the God-man—the idea of the divine essence of mankind, an immanent deity which moves and struggles in every creature and overcomes finitude in the consciousness of man.<sup>136</sup> For Drews especially, the revival of Gnosticism proffered the only plausible alternative for the religiosity of the future: “How, then, can we be asked to admit that the salvation of modern times depends on a belief that has, in the Churches, degenerated into a stupid superstition? [...] Are the ideas of a remote age and a degenerate culture to keep us under their power forever?”<sup>137</sup>

As long as modern scholars treated the Gospels as exoteric historical documents, they

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<sup>134</sup> Drews, *Witnesses of the Historicity* 303.

<sup>135</sup> Drews, *Witnesses of the Historicity* 302.

<sup>136</sup> Again, Drews expresses this sentiment most clearly: “The historical clothing of the Christian idea of redemption is ruined as soon as it is, as in our time, made the express object of scientific inquiry and historical criticism, on account of the rise of historical science and the stimulation of the senses of reality. *The purely historical conception of Jesus cannot satisfy the religious consciousness of our age.* It owes its prestige in reality to the effects of a way of thinking that is regarded by its adherents themselves as obsolete. A single historical personality can no longer be the redeeming principle of humanity that has not merely broken with the geocentric and anthropocentric view of the origin of Christianity, but has seen through the superstitious nature of ecclesiastical Christology. What was once a prerogative of Christianity—that it superseded the polytheism of pagan antiquity, and conceived the idea of the divine Savior in the singular and historically—is today the greatest hindrance to faith. Modern humanity has, therefore, the task of again universalizing the idea of divine redemption, or enlarging the idea of a god-man, which is common in Christendom, to the idea of god-humanity.”<sup>136</sup> Far from the modern fundamentalists’ materially-minded focus on literalism and a personal Lord and Savior, Christianity was in reality a Gnostic cult based not on a personality but instead on spiritual ideals.

<sup>137</sup> Drews, *Witnesses of the Historicity* 303.

would keep themselves blind to the entire point behind early Christian literature as Gnostic treatises. Drews own assertion that an exoteric interpretation of Christian scriptures marked the devolution of religiosity seemed supported by the fact that those sects of Christianity opposed to the Christ Myth were exactly those Drews detested: liberal Protestants.

As the press that covered the Christ-Myth debate suggested, the religious criticisms of scholars like Drews proffered a secular liberation no less egalitarian or erudite than Luther's instigation of the Protestant Reformation. In a modern, industrial environment where Europeans were more literate than ever, more scientific than ever, and more conscious of the ancient world than ever, this analogy was a timely encouragement to scholars such as Drews, Delitzsch, Carus, and Niemojewski, who often pictured themselves as the logical post-Enlightenment consequence of the Protestant Reformation.<sup>138</sup> As Delitzsch declared in his first lecture, it was the task of modern scholars to carry the approach to religion a step further:

These are facts which from the point of view of science are as immutable as rock, however stubbornly people on both sides of the Atlantic may close their eyes to them. When we remember that minds of the stamp of Luther and Melanchthon once contemptuously rejected the Copernican system of astronomy, we may be certain that the results of the scientific criticism of the Pentateuch will tarry long for recognition. Yet it is just as certain some day they will be openly admitted.<sup>139</sup>

In distain for fellow biblical scholars of Gnosticism such as Ernst Troeltsch and Adolf von Harnack, who countered his conclusions, Drews later claimed that only socio-

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<sup>138</sup> See Andrzej Niemojewski, *Astrale Geheimnisse des Christentums* (Frankfurt am Main: Neuer Frankfurter Verlag GmbH, 1913): 98; Drews, *Die Leugnung* 224. Carus's observation is worth repeating, since it pits the question regarding ahistorical scriptural interpretation as something inevitable in modernism: "The Emperor's letter is an important document in the evolution of religion. He is a pronounced upholder of militant and pious Protestantism, and his views may be regarded as typical for large classes of all Protestant denominations. [Thus] the struggle over Babel and Bible opens to the Christian laity a period of discussion concerning the nature of the Old Testament which is bound to lead an investigation of the New Testament./ The battle concerning the Old Testament is as good as ended" (Cited in Delitzsch 139-140).

<sup>139</sup> Delitzsch 41.

psychological and dogmatic biases could explain the prevailing support for the historicity of Jesus.<sup>140</sup> Even for nonbelieving scholars, he asserted, the traditional opinion was so engrained into the mainstream conscious that its sheer irrationality had become seemingly impervious to scientific reason.<sup>141</sup> It is therefore no wonder that, in light of this purported stubbornness, this new breed of scholars thought that the European public *should* be dragged into the debate.

The upcoming chapters of this study demonstrates that the creators of Weimar science fiction cinema derived inspiration for their films from the revival of Gnosticism that flourished at the start of the twentieth century. Surrounded in controversy and revisionist notions of liberation, enlightenment, and reform, Gnosticism enjoyed an unprecedented revival as the scientific research of scholars and the radical agendas of leaders behind the modern occult movement disseminated their knowledge about this seemingly pervasive and resilient cosmology into the public conscious. Drawing their inspiration from this movement, German-speaking authors of proto-science fiction and fantasy convened

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<sup>140</sup> Alluding to Christological perception of Christ as the “elder brother” of humanity mentioned in the New Testament epistles, Drews indicated that humanity has, in its own essence, the psychic capacity to attune itself with “the one reality of nature and its spiritual nature.” Jesus, who came to recognize himself as the anointed Son of God, is the idea toward which modern humanity should also cultivate itself according to his holy example, since, after all, every human is a child of God the Father. Even the teachings of Jesus attest to this personal salvation by self-knowledge, as well as the events occurring within the Gospels—such as the curtain in the Holy of Holies at the Temple in Jerusalem, which, upon Jesus’s death by crucifixion, was miraculously torn from top to bottom. In the most personal way, God has thus granted man direct access to Himself, if man only searches within his own self, itself the Temple of God: “Thus man is placed in a position to save himself, *without a mediator, simply on account of his own divine nature*. Self-redemption is not a redemption of the ego by itself, as our opponents misrepresent, but of the ego by the *self*, of the *phenomenon* by the *divine fund of being in man*. [...] The religion of the future will either be a *belief in the divine nature of the self*, or will be nothing. And if there is no other redemption of man than redemption by himself, *by the spiritual and divine nature of the self*, no Christ is needed for it, and there is no ground for concern that religion may perish with the denial of the historicity of Jesus. In a Monistic religion, which alone is compatible with modern thought, the idea of a religious significance of Christ is not only superfluous, but mischievous. It loads the religious consciousness with doubtful historical ballast; it grants the past an authority over the religious life of the present, and it prevents men from deducing the real consequences of their Monistic religious principles. Hence I insist that the belief in the historical reality of Jesus is the *chief obstacle to religious progress*; and therefore the question of his historicity is not a purely historical, but also a philosophical-religious, question” (Drews, *Witnesses of the Historicity of Jesus* 307).

<sup>141</sup> See e.g. Drews, *Die Leugnung* 126-127.

regularly with prominent mystics to discuss occult phenomena, researched Gnostic texts with one another, and even imbued their novels, stories, poetry, and plays with their peculiar fantastic elements. While further investigation should determine the extent of their involvement in these circles, there is sufficient proof from their personal lives, filmographies, and writings that the directors and screenwriters behind Weimar science fiction cinema were among these creative minds during the first three decades of the twentieth century.

Despite their different approaches to the Orient and occultism, the *fin-de-siècle* mystics would prove central to the dissemination of the Gnostic revival in German-speaking Europe as well as its influence on avant-garde authors of the fantastic and the supernatural. Delving deep into the Christian-Gnostic tradition and finding its mythic connections with other mystery religions, these esoteric thinkers explained how the modern human species had evolved to a point that it had developed, in addition to a higher state of consciousness, a greater propensity toward abstract and allegorical thinking than in the first and second centuries. While not identifying the mythological teachings with the Christian Gnosticism of Hellenistic times, these esoteric schools claimed to have transformed in their doctrines the best possible transliterations and revisionism for modern Western humanity in its current stage of evolution and experience of the industrialized lifestyle.

As this symbiosis of scholarship and mysticism demonstrate, the revival of Gnosticism in German-speaking Europe kindled heterodox ideologies by not only impacting how Westerners perceived their spiritual and intellectual heritage, but also how they drew the lines between scientific research and spirituality, as well as the ancient and

the modern. This study argues that, especially before the Great War, these lines were very vague, and that, in the decade after the war, this historical consciousness especially continued to influence popular conceptions of science and spirituality. As a result, these popular conceptions of science and spirituality would go on to inspire the creators of the most grotesque and bizarre pulp and science fiction in Weimar culture, in manifold and often unexpected ways. In other words, it can be easily demonstrated that the widespread fascination with the modern occult sciences, new perspectives on the ancient Orient, and the revival of Gnosticism had a direct impact on the novelists, screenwriters, and directors Weimar-era fantasy and science fiction, and that this impact finds its origins in the pioneers of fantasy fiction between 1900 and 1917.

Born between 1870 and 1890, the future directors and screenwriters behind Weimar science fiction cinema surely became aware of the widespread cultural milieu pertaining to the ancient Orient, the revival of Gnosticism, and the rampant scholarly questioning of the Western theological heritage. Although exact dates are, at present, unknown, it is obvious that by the end of the Great War the soon-to-be creators of German science fiction cinema exhibited a profound enthusiasm for the ancient, the esoteric, and the occult. Collectively, their interest extended beyond the Judeo-Christian mystical traditions, and even Greco-Roman mythology, into the realm of the ancient Orient whose ancient wisdom spanned from Hindu fakirs and Buddhist monks in India, and back to the earliest shaman of China and Babylonia. Above all, none of these individuals could have ignored the bourgeois occult circles including Theosophy, Ordo Templi Orientis, and Anthroposophy whose agendas for a modern Gnostic revival were openly and widely proclaimed. It is precisely this ultramodern revisionism of antiquity that shook

Europeans' worldview during the early twentieth century, and which resonated from intellectual to cultural circles in profound and pervasive ways—affecting even the narratives and themes later to come in Germany's science fiction cinema.

## CHAPTER TWO RECURRENCE OF THE PAST

On a moonlit hillside a young man crouches behind a boulder, looking on as an old man with a shovel crosses his path. Looming overhead in the background, a body hangs at the gallows. An intertitle informs the audience that, according to medieval legend, “the mandrake root could transform into a human being.” Suddenly, the youth attacks the old man. Another intertitle: “One had to exhume the root at night by a full moon, driving a spade into the earth beneath the gallows as the clock struck twelve. With its magical power, the mandrake root had the ability to bring the person good luck—but also suffering and agony to the one who took it.”<sup>142</sup> Then, seizing the spade, the youth steals to the gallows. An immediate cut joins a lecture by “Privy Councilor Professor Jakob ten Brinken, a world-renown scholar for his research on genetic crossbreeding (Professor ten Brinken: Paul Wegener).”<sup>143</sup>

At first, this modern setting seems entirely unrelated to the eerie mandrake legend. But the professor’s lecture only turns out to be a continuation of the earlier narrative when he proposes to take the mandrake “out of the superstition of dark days” and “into the clear light of science.”<sup>144</sup>

So begins *Alraune*, which premiered in Berlin on 25 January 1928. By juxtaposing the fabled scenario to the Privy Councilor’s lecture, Galeen bridged the historical gap

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<sup>142</sup> Original: „Im frühen Mittelalter entstand die Alraune-Sage. Alraune, nach der Sage eine Wurzel, formte sich zu einem menschlichen Wesen. /Nachts, bei Vollmond zog man aus, um die Wurzel auszugraben. Wenn die Uhr 12 schlug, sollte man unter dem Galgen mit dem Spaten in die Erde stechen. /Die Alraunewurzel sollte mit ihrer Zauberkraft den Menschen Glück bringen— aber auch Leiden und Qualen, wer sie an sich nahm.“ All translations of film intertitles are my own, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>143</sup> Original: „Seine Exzellenz Geheimrat Professor Jakob ten Brinken war eine weltberühmte Kapazität der Kreuzung von Erbanlagen. (Professor ten Brinken.. Paul Wegener).“

<sup>144</sup> This quote comes in a later scene, when, before his experiment, ten Brinken turns to the mandrake root that he clenches in his hand, and pledges to it: „Alraune, du des Gehängten Tochter – aus des Aberglaubens dunklen Tagen, ich werde dich ins klare Licht der Wissenschaft führen.“

between medieval alchemy and modern biochemistry. “I want to explore the old superstition scientifically,” continues ten Brinken, urging his colleagues: “We must go beyond the way that Professor Voronoff’s ingenious experiment has set forth. [...] Above all, we need to monitor the results. Perhaps this will also open new possibilities in the scientific study of the human race.”<sup>145</sup> Disgusted, the professor’s nephew (Iván Petrovich) advises against the proposal—not because he finds it foolish, but rather “a transgression against Nature.” But, discarding the warning, the ambitious Privy Councilor prepares his experiment straightaway. This opening scene’s fascination with unconventional experimentation, its ambivalence toward the unknown, and its passion for the technological application of science typifies the allure of arcane knowledge so indicative of Weimar Germany’s science fiction cinema.

But these mystical themes, hardly new to the proto-genre of science fiction, had already enjoyed widespread readership in German-speaking Europe in the form of novels and pulp literature as early as the Wilhelmine era. Up to the last days of the Great War, the German-language press printed affordable periodicals with sensationalist tales and snippets from stories and poetry ranging from the gothic horror of E.T.A. Hoffmann to the weird detective thrillers of Edgar Allan Poe. Their immense popularity would later influence the enterprising creators of Weimar science fiction, who often utilized their tropes for their own fantastic plots. Of the five science fiction films produced in Weimar Germany, the single storyline not based on an original screenplay was Galeen’s *Alraune*. Rather, its bizarre tale about a modern biochemist’s obsession to replicate the alchemical experiment is lifted quite faithfully from a book of the same name published in 1911.

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<sup>145</sup> Full quote from Original: „Bei meiner Beschäftigung mit diesen Problemen bin ich auf die Alraune-Sage gestoßen, und nun werde ich den alten Aberglauben wissenschaftlich erforschen. /Zu meinen Studenten sage ich stets: Wir müssen über den Weg hinausgehen, den uns Professor Voronoffs genialer Versuch gewiesen hat.“

Eventually, by 1928 Galeen had already produced three films with the aid of the novel's author, Hanns Heinz Ewers. In conveying the sensationalist themes in his easy-to-read stories, Ewers was famous for his distinct mixture of science, technology, psychology, and the occult.<sup>146</sup>

And yet, Ewer's works of science fiction and fantasy were no more unique to literature before total war than Galeen's films were to cinema after it. In addition, it is particularly noteworthy that, besides the occult, both Ewers and Galeen exhibited a profound personal interest in Gnosticism and the ancient Orient. Nor was this fascination an exception to their profession. During the prewar era and well into the 1920s, famous German-speaking writers of fantasy and proto-science fiction, including Alfred Kubin, Gustav Meyrink, and Karl Hans Strobl, found inspiration in the ancient Orient, the occult, and the philosophical milieu of the Gnostic revival. Among their ranks were the future directors and screenwriters of Weimer-era cinema, who, in the wake of total war, would filter these same themes into their artistic renderings of the postwar European environment, especially in their works of science fiction.

By and large, the fascination and inspiration that these writers of the fantastic and the supernatural shared sprung out of the intellectual discourse within the milieu of classical modernism, which, exploding onto the public scene in the years before the Great War, evoked its own unique sense of unrealism and unease in the hearts and minds of modern Europeans. While some writers pulled directly from the intellectual discourse during the *fin de siècle*, others drew from the teachings of contemporary mystics such as Rudolf Steiner and Carl Kellner, whose familiarity with these ancient texts became the focal

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<sup>146</sup> Verna Schuetz, "The Bizarre Literature of Hanns Heinz Ewers, Alfred Kubin, Gustav Meyrink, and Karl Hans Strobl" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1974): 1.

point in their lectures and societies. In all cases, their access to these materials through publications and organizations demonstrates how the occult movement used both recent scientific discoveries and scholarly discourse in its own revival of Gnosticism as an alternative mode of modern spirituality. While not all the creators of Weimar-era cinema may have openly subscribed to Gnostic teachings, dabbled in occultism, or displayed an affinity for the ancient Orient, their personal lives, novels, and filmographies demonstrate that they were certainly conscious of these ideas within the cultural milieu of German-speaking Europe.

#### THE FANTASTIC AS SCIENTIFIC FACT

Similar to Galeen's account of the mandrake root legend, Hans Werckmeister, Hanns Walter Kornblum, and Fritz Lang also opened their films with musings on science and technology as something primeval in the human condition. The prologues to their films and the narratives behind them hinge on a common premise: the eternal recurrence of—versus the mere return to—a primal past. In addition, the pursuit of highly scientific, technocratic goals via irrational, yet effective, occult means is a remarkably common theme that the filmmakers of Weimar science fiction could not seem to avoid any less than their blatant reliance on the knowledge of the ancients in order to verify transcendental phenomena from a microcosmic to a macrocosmic scale.

Confirming age-old assertions about the cosmos regarding such topics as astrology and alchemy, these filmmakers stuffed into the mouths of their characters and onto intertitles references to Babylon, India, and the Middle East, fusing their fantastic plots with modern science and technology. Thus, in these films the knowledge of the ancients is vindicated—not explained away by mere analogy, metaphor, or naturalized proofs.

But more than an element of the fantastic, this seemingly marvelous relationship between the spiritual and the scientific resonates in many respects with the core tension between intellectuals and the adherents of the Gnostic revival in *fin-de-siècle* Europe. As the science fiction films of Weimar Germany imply, the popular and, to some extent, the intellectual conceptions of the demarcations between science and spirituality were hardly as displaced from the monistic worldview of ancient scientists as many in the twentieth century presume in hindsight.

#### *Thresholds into the Transcendental*

Examining Weimar science fiction cinema as a reflection of the ironies of modern identity is, of course, far from labeling its content as the quintessence of the cultural rejection of the Western heritage. Further research is required to determine the extent to which all these filmmakers consciously employed these themes to reflect, as it were, the prewar intellectual and cultural milieu in German-speaking Europe. By blurring the present with the past and the future, the premises and themes behind their feature attractions played on human experience in modernity. In other words, the Weimar-era filmmakers conceived science fiction as a genre that was as much a prediction about the science of the future as a reflection on the science of yesterday—that is to say, the occult sciences.

In Galeen's cinematic adaptation of *Alraune*, the motivation behind Professor ten Brinken's experiment was the real-life French surgeon Serge Voronoff, who won fame in the 1920s and 1930s for grafting monkey testicle tissue onto the testicles of men—a controversial experiment in its own right. Considered a miracle of science, the transplants purportedly secreted hormones to rejuvenate the patron's stamina and

youthful vitality.<sup>147</sup> And yet *Alraune* puts a twist on this experiment by its relation to the mandrake myth. Ten Brinken anticipates his *own* good luck when, on the night of a full moon, he artificially inseminates a prostitute—his surrogate for the fertile soil below the gallows—with an injection containing a mandrake root and the final emission of a rapist-murderer.<sup>148</sup> By conquering the alchemist's dream to spawn a homunculus in his own medical ward, the reckless biochemist has applied all the trappings of a modern surgeon while ironically transcending the conventional application of science. But though ten Brinken has reevaluated this myth of the past in order to develop a technology for the future, he is soon to discover, to his own dismay, that the foretold curses of his creation are as equally valid as its alleged benefits.

In *Algol*, Werckmeister opened with the establishing shot of an observatory telescope probing the night sky in search of the planet Algol. As the lens focuses on the star, the intertitles overview the contemporary scientific knowledge of this “riddle of the heavens,” a variable star whose brightness dies out every third night for three hours. As Algol extinguishes itself before the audience, another intertitle explains that this phenomenon has been tracked by scientists immemorial. “The Greek astrologers called it the Demon,” observes an intertitle, as men in togas standing among ionic columns point into the nocturnal sky. This is followed by another sequence featuring Arabian astronomers, who “called Algol the eye of the Devil.”<sup>149</sup> No sooner is this noted than a

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<sup>147</sup> Voronoff's surgical procedures enjoyed immense popularity in Europe and the United States for their therapeutic wonders. See Serge Voronoff, *Rejuvenation by Grafting*, trans. ed. Fred F. Imianitoff (New York, NY: Adelphi, 1925).

<sup>148</sup> This is a departure from Ewers' novel. Penned almost a decade before Voronoff's grafting surgery, the novel attributes ten Brinken's motivation in part to his sadistic curiosities about occultism and artificial insemination. Cf. Hanns Heinz Ewers, *Alraune: Die Geschichte eines lebenden Wesens* (München: Georg Müller Verlag GmbH, 1911/1916): 64-69.

<sup>149</sup> Original: „Hoch und unendlich fern kreist und leuchtet der Stern Algol, das Rätsel des Himmels... /Denn seit undenkbarer Zeit bis auf diesen Tag verdunkelt das Licht dieses Sternes immer in der dritten Nacht auf 10 Stunden...“

circle of robed Middle Easterners watch from their high tower as the star transforms into a disembodied head. Its misshapen face grows in size and brightness as its intensity swallows the night sky with a hideous grimace, while the astronomers, overcome by fear and blindness, stagger down the steps of their observatory.

As the drama of the film ensues, the audience is thus filled with sense of foreboding, knowing that, in spite of man's scientific devices, the impending return of "Algol" will always take him by surprise. This occurs when Robert Herne (Emil Jannings), a coalminer, discovers his diminutive assistant (John Gottowt) is actually an alien from the star Algol. Offering the disillusioned mortal an escape from his life of toil, the alien presents him with a strange machine powered by the supersensible rays of the variable star, and promises Robert that the machine will make him the wealthiest man in the world. Within a year, Robert gains international publicity as the proprietor of the mysterious "Bios-Works," an electrical powerhouse whose efficiency secures him with unlimited power as it eventually outruns the coal reserves of the world in its production of kinetic energy. But while he openly exploits the rays from Algol, Robert still refuses to share with his engineers the ancient secret behind this marvel of technology. Paranoid and suspicious, Robert jealously guards the knowledge, whose ominous power this novice technician—like the rest of the modern world—seem to have forgotten altogether.

Kornblum and Lang base their science fictions as much on technocracy as on the ancient history of astronomy. The first scene of Kornblum's *Wunder der Schöpfung* opens with a montage of Babylonian pyramids and Chinese towers, where astronomers tinker with their tools (Fig. 2.1). Immediately comes a long shot of the universe in

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/...um in der 4. Nacht wieder hell zu erstrahlen. /Die griechischen Sterndeuter nannten ihn Dämon. /Die arabischen Himmelsforscher hießen ihn Algol, das Auge des Teufels.“

motion and the proclamation: “The human spirit has always pondered the riddles of the sky.”<sup>150</sup> Afterward, as modern-day scientists launch a spaceship to investigate the planets of the solar system, it is understood that the laws of the universe are, like their allure to man, eternal (Fig. 2.2). As the ship accelerates from the earth at some 3,500 light-years, the captain explains that, due to the speed of the ship: “From this immense distance, we see no longer the events of the recent past, but rather those from the dim antiquity.”<sup>151</sup> To demonstrate, he turns on a television, whose screen suddenly illuminates with an image of Moses descending from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments. As the astronomers’ discussion of the most recent discoveries in quantum physics are supplemented by quotes of the Christian Old Testament, Goethe, and Kant, the lines between science, mysticism, fantasy, and fact become clouded as the film progresses.

But science and technology do not gaze into the dim past alone. At the end of Kornblum’s science fiction, the narrator poses the question: “And what will the fate of the earth be?” A series of scenarios flash on the screen, as finally an intertitle suggests: “Two heavenly bodies can collide.” Suddenly, astronomers are shown in an observatory, pointing to falling asteroids as lay people huddle around them. Then, as the entire throng is pummeled by fire and brimstone, an intertitle points to the words of Jesus regarding the Apocalypse: “And there shall be signs in the sun, moon, and stars. And the people shall die of fear and expectation of the things which shall come upon the whole globe, and the powers of heaven shall be shaken.”<sup>152</sup> No sooner are the halls of the observatory crushed

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<sup>150</sup> Original: „Von jeher haben die Rätsel des Himmels den menschlichen Geist zum Nachdenken angeregt.“

<sup>151</sup> Original: „Aus dieser ungeheureren Entfernung erblicken wir auf die Erde nun nicht mehr die Ereignisse jüngster Vergangenheit, sondern die aus grauer Vorzeit.“

<sup>152</sup> In the Christian Bible, this quote appears in Luke 21:25-26. Original: „Und welches wird das Schicksal der Erde sein? [...] /Zwei Gestirne können zusammenprallen. /So könnte sich das Bibelwort erfüllen: /,Und es werden Zeichen an Sonne, Mond und Sternen sein.’ /,Und die Menschen werden vergehen vor Furcht und Erwartung der Dinge, die über den ganzen Erdball kommen werden, und die Kräfte des Himmels werden erschüttert werden.““

than the entire planet is swallowed mercilessly by a rising sea of flames.

Similarly, Lang began *Metropolis* with an epigram: “The mediator between the head and the hands must be the heart,” a phrase later repeated by the proletarian heroine Maria (Brigitte Helm) in her retelling of the legend of the Tower of Babel. When the workers (the “hands”) tell the girl they would rather revolt against Metropolis’s chief executive (the “head”) than wait for their unknown mediator, she uses the parable to entreat her brothers to learn from the builders and designers of the Tower of Babel, who, without awaiting reconciliation by their own mediator, fell into discord and destroyed their great civilization. This struggle against destiny is underscored by the antagonism between the hero, a young engineer and the son of the chief executive of Metropolis, Freder Fredersen (Gustav Fröhlich), and the scientist-alchemist responsible for powering the machines of Metropolis, Rotwang (Rudolf Klein-Rogge). During the course of the drama, Freder becomes aware of the primal energy by which Rotwang has animated the machines of the city, as Rotwang, aware of the young engineer’s mission to ally himself with Maria and free the workers, seeks to hinder the rebellion through his magical technology.

It is significant to note that, in contrast to Werckmeister and Kornblum, Lang relied on visual composition rather than intertitles to convey the well-known association between Babylon and astronomy. As a result, its subtle connection makes Lang’s illustration of Maria’s parable all the more magical. In it, a saint-like figure, dressed as an astronomer-priest, conceives the inspiration for its design while gazing into the heavens. A circle of fellow initiates sit around him as he says: “Come, let us build a tower whose top will reach to the stars! And at the top of the tower we will inscribe: Great is the world and its

Creator! And great is man!” (Fig. 2.3).<sup>153</sup> But their plan proves easier said than done, as the sages hire foreign laborers to construct the tower. Unmotivated by the fervor of the astronomer-priest, the workers find themselves oppressed in the ambitious project. Enraged, they destroy both the visionary and his uncompleted structure. As they raise protesting fists to what suddenly dissolves into crushed rubble, the astronomer-priest’s words shimmer ironically where the tower would have reached, as though emblazoned in the stars: “Great is the world and its Creator, and great is man” (Fig. 2.4).

By referencing the occult associations behind astronomy and biochemistry, these directors evoked the ancient equivalents of these modern sciences: *astrology* and *alchemy*. These sly connections between science and occultism reveal the cunning of not just the directors but also the screenwriters behind their narratives, viz. Hans Brennert and Fridel Köhne in *Algol* and Thea von Harbou in *Metropolis*. (The screenplays for *Wunder* and *Alraune* were written by their directors.) Undoubtedly, both the directors and the screenwriters would have communicated about how best to convey these scripted allusions through the visual medium of film. Von Harbou, for example, wrote not just the screenplay but also a novel version for *Metropolis*, which upon completion in 1925 was serialized in the popular *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* as the start of a two-year promotional campaign for the film. During an interview about their contents in 1976, Lang recalled: “The thesis [i.e., book] was Mrs. von Harbou’s, but I am at least 50

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<sup>153</sup> Original: „Auf! Lasset uns einen Turm bauen, dessen Spitze bis an die Sterne reiche! / Und an die Spitze des Turmes wollen wir schreiben: Gross ist die Welt und ihr Schöpfer! Und gross ist der Mensch!“ Note that repeatedly in this scene Lang cuts to images of the Tower as envisioned literally in the sky, superimposed above the actors who raise their hands to the obviously ethereal nature of its essence. In addition to the centrality of starry night skies in this sequence, Lang’s emphasis on the priest’s heavenly vision and his description of the great tower suggests that *its purpose is to serve as an observatory*.

percent responsible because I did it.”<sup>154</sup> The words astrology, alchemy, and occultism make no appearance in either von Harbou’s novel or her script, but Lang had been fully aware of the screenwriter’s intentions throughout the two-year production of their film: “Mrs. von Harbou and I put in the script a battle between modern science and occultism, the science of the medieval ages.”<sup>155</sup>

Lang’s knowledge of the occult themes behind von Harbou’s script for *Metropolis* demonstrates how directors could and did collaborate with screenwriters on such elements in their films. In light of his subtle references to the ancient practice of astrology in the Tower of Babel scene, Lang’s comment attests to the likelihood that other directors were mutually conscious in representing as much *visually* about the occult—through symbols, geometric schemas, and gestures—as their screenwriters attempted to convey linguistically through their dialogues. While the intimate business relations between Lang and von Harbou (who were married between 1922 and 1933)<sup>156</sup> was admittedly atypical, silent-era screenwriters interacted with directors more frequently than they later would in sound films. This in so small part is due to the lack of sound on the production set, since one of the screenwriter’s main tasks in the silent era was to assist the director to express in front of the camera what he had glibly explained in his script.<sup>157</sup> In all likelihood, then, Brennert and Köhne aided Werckmeister through *Algol* in a similar fashion.

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<sup>154</sup> Peter Bogdanovich. *Who the Devil Made It: Conversations with Legendary Film Directors* (New York, NY: Ballantine Publishing, 1997): 178.

<sup>155</sup> For reasons that will be discussed in the upcoming chapters, this study takes issue with Lang’s choice of words about a “battle” between science and occultism, since throughout both von Harbou’s novel as well as Lang’s film, there is no clear line between occultism and science. Bogdanovich 124. For contrasts between modern and medieval elements in the film, see R.L. Rutsky, “The Meditation of Technology and Gender: *Metropolis*, Nazism, Modernism,” *New German Critique* 59 (Spring/Summer 1993): 18-32.

<sup>156</sup> McGilligan 87-88, 208.

<sup>157</sup> For the cooperation of directors and screenwriters in Weimar Germany, see Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After* 5-7.

In their own research on the premodern worldview and the occult sciences, German-speaking scholars during the *fin de siècle* noted that the occult sciences have everything to do with Gnosticism. Dedicating his career to investigating the link between science and the occult, the historian Franz Strunz indicated that the peculiar craft of alchemy, which originated in Egypt, reserved own metaphysical implications in which metallurgical experiments were to their practitioners inextricable from private spiritual sacraments.<sup>158</sup> Numerous intellectuals including Franz Boll, Wilhelm Erbt, Andrzej Niemojewski, and Eduard von Stucken showed the many ways that ancient civilizations had applied their erudite knowledge of the stars to their religious myths and rituals, medical expertise, plans for war, and foreign diplomacy as well as to their agricultural practices, trade systems, and travel.<sup>159</sup> They thus confirmed that, in the ancient worldview, astrology and astronomy, the spiritual and the scientific, were conceived as inextricably one. The mythologies behind these constellations were preserved by the ancients as esoteric tales that penetrated deep into the human experience. The astronomer-priests, synonymous with astrologers, in these ancient cultures had encoded into these astrological myths their own tales for spiritual illumination.<sup>160</sup>

Because of this prevalence but also because of its ties to questions of freewill and eschatology, scholars most readily associated astrology with the Gnosticism of the

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<sup>158</sup> Most of Strunz's research on alchemy and astrology began in the first decade of the century. See Franz Strunz's discussion of theoretical and applied chemistry in his *Geschichte der Naturwissenschaften im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Verlag von Ferdinand Enke, 1910): 64-80. For thorough examination on the Gnostic implications of alchemy, see his *Astrologie, Alchemie, Mystik: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Naturwissenschaften* (München-Planegg: Otto Wilhelm Barth-Verlag GmbH, 1928).

<sup>159</sup> See Andrzej Niemojewski, *Gott Jesus im Lichte fremder und eigener Forschungen samt Darstellung der evangelischen Astralstoffe, Astralszenen und Astralsysteme*, Vol. I-III. (München: A. & R. Huber's Verlag GmbH, 1910) and Wilhelm Erbt, *Das Markusevangelium: eine Untersuchung über die Form der Petruserinnerungen und die Geschichte der Urgemeinde* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1911).

<sup>160</sup> This is a main argument behind Andrzej Niemojewski, *Gott Jesus im Lichte fremder und eigener Forschungen samt Darstellung der evangelischen Astralstoffe, Astralszenen und Astralsysteme*, Vol. I & II. München: A. & R. Huber's Verlag GmbH, 1910.

ancients. Wolfgang Schultz echoed the arguments of his elders when asserting that Gnostic strains in Hellenistic Judaism were influenced by an “astral doctrine” extending as far back as Babylon, where astronomer-priests used this nuanced technique not only for interpreting the stars but also for reading the esoteric significance behind the myths of constellations.<sup>161</sup> In *Dokumente der Gnosis* (Documents of Gnosis), whose title page bears the twelve signs of the zodiac, Schultz stated that at the center of this cosmology stood astrology, whose cryptic language

accounts for the practically greatest part of magical wisdom, [and] is also of the highest significance for the arrangement of the schemas of Gnostic thought. Certainly it would be wrong to pass astrology off for Gnosticism, but it has very profoundly influenced the shape of Gnosticism and has virtually underwritten later Gnostic and magical practices in their related fields.<sup>162</sup>

Ten years before Schultz, the prominent British Theosophist and student of Gnosticism G.R.S. Mead had made a similar argument in his seminal *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten* (1900). Drawing largely from German-language scholarship on Gnosticism, he cited the early Church Fathers Tertullian, Irenaeus, and especially Hippolytus, who noted that the correspondence between astrological symbolism and the teaching of Gnosticism is “simply astrology allegorized, or rather we should say cosmogony theologized.”<sup>163</sup> A central topic in esoteric schools before the Great War, this radical notion not only changed the way many viewed Western religion and the praxis of science and spirituality,

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<sup>161</sup> See e.g., Franz Boll, *Aus der Offenbarung Johannes: Hellenistische Studien zum Weltbild der Apokalypse* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1914); Franz Cumont, *Astrology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans* (New York, NY: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912); and Eduard Stucken, *Astralmythen der Hebräer, Babylonier und Ägypter = Abraham* (1896), *Lot* (1897), *Jakob* (1899), *Esau* (1901), *Mose* (1907) (Leipzig: Verlag von Eduard Pfeiffer).

<sup>162</sup> Original: „Sie macht fast den größten Teil des Zauberwesens aus, sie ist auch für die Gliederung der gnostischen Systeme von höchster Bedeutung. Sicherlich wäre es verfehlt, die Gnosis von der Astrologie her zu leiten; aber sie hat die Form der Gnosis sehr tiefgehend beeinflußt und kennzeichnet geradezu jenen Bereich, in dem spätere Gnosis und Zauberwesen einander berühren.“ Wolfgang Schultz, *Dokumente der Gnosis* lxxxii. See also his commentary on Jewish Gnosticism, lxxxi.

<sup>163</sup> G.R.S. Mead, *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten: Some Short Sketches among the Gnostics, Mainly of the First Two Centuries: A Contribution to the Study of Christian Origins based on the Most Recently Recovered Materials* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1900): 209, 332-333.

but also reinforced the occult conception about the cosmic unity between the macrocosm and the microcosm.<sup>164</sup>

This ancient doctrine was perfectly in keeping with the Gnostic-inspired doctrines of *fin-de-siècle* esoteric schools. The human realization of the relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm takes place, so to speak, beyond space and time in an incommunicable realm beyond the present psychosomatic condition of human logic and experience. According to Rudolf Steiner and others, this transcendental experience was in part the reason why such sacred mysteries had become severed, neglected, or suppressed by orthodox Christianity into the early medieval period, before most souls (even as Jesus Himself acknowledged in the Gospels) had developed the psychical capacity required to ascertain the message of truth.<sup>165</sup> Alluding to the Gnostic worldview, Steiner noted how this primal experience of truth is markedly distinct from the Hindu-Buddhist concepts of Moksha or Nirvana:

People often wallow in the notion of merging into a “cosmic consciousness of the all,” imagining that to be salvation. There is no such “cosmic consciousness of the all” and never will be. Human beings are now attaining the capacity to say “I.” The more they say “I” and work through this I on their three lower members (the astral, the etheric, and physical bodies) the stronger the I becomes and the more they develop themselves for the future.<sup>166</sup>

Faithful to the Gnostic tradition, modern mystics taught that true expansion of individual

<sup>164</sup> For a brief discussion of the microcosm and the macrocosm in early modern sciences and esoteric practices, see Roland Edighoffer, “Hermeticism in Early Rosicrucianism,” in Roelf Van der Broek and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, ed. *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998): 205-207.

<sup>165</sup> Likewise, Heindel and Steiner asserted that the historical occlusion of this mythos occurred out of necessity, since its complex cosmogony and anthropogony—which included Hermetic concepts of preexistence, reincarnation, and metaphysical sin—could not adequately be conveyed to all peoples according to their phyletic stages toward complete individuation. Max Heindel, *Cosmo-Conception* 400-406. Rudolf Steiner, “The Historical Significance of the Blood That Flowed on the Cross: March 25, 1907, Berlin,” Christopher Bamford, et. al., trans. *The Christian Mystery: Lectures* (Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1998): 83.

<sup>166</sup> Steiner, “The Promise of the Spirit of Truth: March 8, 1907, Cologne,” *The Christian Mystery* 60-61. This assertion does not undermine the unity of truth, since, as Steiner notes, the more enlightened people progress toward their path toward individuation, “human beings can continually become selfless, because that is what they want. One day all human beings will have arrived at the pinnacle of the I-being’s development” (*ibid.* 60).

consciousness comes through developing altruistic selfhood, not suppressing it into servility or feigned humility. Only then will one truly know in the super-logical faculties of his mind—not the cognition of his brain—how “[t]he degree of consciousness once achieved by the human being can never be lost.”<sup>167</sup> In its cosmic holism, this theory is very similar to the revelations of Gnosticism.

As their prologues make clear, these filmmakers drew associations between the occult sciences and Gnosticism that were prevalent among scholars and popular conception alike. By linking ancient and modern science in their cinematic premises, these screenwriters and directors underscored a Gnostic presumption about the individual’s conscious engagement with the supersensible consciousness of the cosmos. Knowledge, in this sense, is power. But the proto-science fiction films of Weimar Germany play on this esoteric cosmic conception by profaning its message into exoteric storylines. Rather than an *intuited ascertainment* of the supersensible, these filmmakers portrayed the *cognitive comprehension* of these same metaphysical forces in order to lend filmic expression to occult phenomena. If the conscious engagement of one’s cognitive faculties in the applied sciences—whether mediated by microscope or telescope—represents how the human species systemizes, explores, classifies, expands, and organizes its awareness of the phenomenological world, then this interaction between man, his tools, and nature quite literally signifies a way for the cosmos to ‘know’ itself.

By outwardly portraying the inward experience of the occult according to Gnostic doctrine, the creators of Weimar science-fiction cinema used their storylines to allegorize the genuine occult experience. Thus, though these plots may seem fanciful and clichéd,

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<sup>167</sup> Steiner, “The Promise of the Spirit of Truth,” *The Christian Mystery* 60.

the logic behind their transcendentalist ethos has profound implications in Gnosticism, astrology, and alchemy.<sup>168</sup> Because these cinematic architects blurred science and occultism, how their characters utilize *scientific knowledge* becomes a dramatically significant trope central to each of their enchanted narratives. Whether they acknowledge it or not, the scientists and other characters in these films are dealing with phenomena caught between the materialist science of today and the mystical science of yesterday.

### *Naturalizing the Supernatural, Supernaturalizing the Natural*

But the demarcations between science and occultism were far from a settled question. Well into the era of the Weimar Republic, Europe's scientific community analyzed, debated, and redrew the lines that separated what modern scholarship could verify and utilize and what it could not. As European universities underwent the consolidation of physics and the creation of specialized chemistry, biology, and physiology in the late nineteenth century, professional scientists began entering their professions with an emphasis in a singular field rather than a traditionally broad area of general study. The reason for this change was the increasingly compartmentalized labor market wrought by industrialization, which demanded ever-narrower expertise for its mechanics, pharmacists, engineers, physicians, and other specialists. However, up until the Great War there were many scientists and physicians who, as proponents of the occult movement, were aware of the pervasiveness of the occult sciences throughout history and still saw, and looked forward to, the affirmation of ancient beliefs by specialized science.

During the *fin de siècle*, social commentators and philosophers hurled harsh critiques at professionalization for essentially equipping men with a shrunken, rather than a

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168 See Antoine Faivre, "Renaissance Hermeticism and the Concept of Western Esotericism" in *Gnosis and Hermeticism esp.* 117-124.

broadened, awareness of the phenomenological world.<sup>169</sup> Seen as opportunistic and shallow, the industrial-age approach to knowledge looked to developing not a well-rounded, contemplative mind but instead one whose concentration, wit, and shrewdness could move with the upkeep of industrial progress and technological expansion. Like their contemporaries, proponents of the Gnostic revival were ambivalent about specialization and professionalism. Setting themselves apart from Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, who in the 1870s and 1880s had unequivocally disparaged material science for its belligerent exclusion of all extrasensory phenomena,<sup>170</sup> the proponents of the occult in German-speaking Europe eagerly conjectured that future developments in science and technology would refute materialism, stimulate the public discourse, and find continuity with the ancient scientific conception of a transcendental universe.

Intrigued by the rapid progress of industrialization, many occult enthusiasts praised modern science and technology, despite its materialism, as a gateway to investigating occult phenomena beyond human sense perception. As early as 1878, the astrophysicist Karl Friedrich Zöllner and the psychologist Carl du Prel, Germany's foremost pioneers in psychical research, reported that studies in physics, electricity, and magnetism had discovered frequencies that seemed to point toward the potential detectability of thought-waves and human spirits in the fourth dimension.<sup>171</sup> These ideas were not mere speculation. They along well-respected scholars including the biologist Alfred Russel

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<sup>169</sup> Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore, MA: John Hopkins University Press, 2004): 19-20.

<sup>170</sup> See, for example, the account contrasting the scientific method of the Psychological Society with the intuited experience promoted by the Theosophical Society in Treitel, *A Science for the Soul* 42-43.

<sup>171</sup> For an investigation on Zöllner's case for the existence of fourth-dimensional entities in his studies on mediumistic sittings, see Treitel, *A Science for the Soul* 3-17. For du Prel's reports on electricity and magnetism, see Carl du Prel, "Die Seelenlehre: vom Standpunkt der Geheimwissenschaften, II," *Sphinx* Vol. 13, No. 75 (May 1892): 217-218. For clarification, see Carl du Prel, "Die Seelenlehre: vom Standpunkt der Geheimwissenschaften, I," *Der Sphinx*, Vol. 13, No. 24 (Apr. 1892): 49-55.

Wallace, the anthropologist Adolf Bastian, and the philosopher Eduard von Hartmann conducted experiments, convened at regular conferences, and published material in scientific and occult journals in drawing their conclusions.<sup>172</sup> It is important to note that, in spite of their own interdisciplinary educations, Zöllner and du Prel formalized their research to fit the trends of expertise, referring to their studies in “transcendental physics” and “transcendental psychology,” respectively.<sup>173</sup> As these terms suggest, scholars who advocated the occult held the universe to be sustained by a sort of pantheistic transcendentalism. Appealing to German Idealism and Kantian philosophy, they argued that what humans delineate as matter and psychic actually coexist with one another on an interdimensional continuum pervading all phenomena.<sup>174</sup>

While their philosophy opposed both materialism and religion, these scholars saw no discrepancy between their worldview and that of scientists immemorial. It may seem contradictory that, in light of their admiration for innovation, these scholars readily embraced occult teachings extending back to Heinrich Agrippa, Plotinus, and Hermes Trismegistus. But professionals in the modern occult movement often pointed out, much to the chagrin of their materialist colleagues, that the pioneers of modern science often made their breakthroughs *because of* their involvement with the occult. They found it no coincidence that Copernicus drew on the secret teachings of Pythagoras and the Kabbalah

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<sup>172</sup> Though Zöllner died before the *fin de siècle*, his ‘transcendental physics’ maintained a following among various intellectuals including the philosopher Eduard von Hartmann, Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, and Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky—who were also three close admirers of du Prel. See Andreas Sommer, “From Astronomy to Transcendental Darwinism: Carl du Prel (1839-1899),” *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2009): 59; Treitel, *A Science for the Soul* 22-24, 52, 354.

<sup>173</sup> As these terms suggest, the influence of Kantian philosophy in their work is obvious. Because both men died before the discovery of general relativity, it is unknown how they might have reconciled Kant with new paradigms in science. Both men frequently referenced Kant in their works. See Johann Karl Friedrich Zöllner, *Transcendental Physics* trans. C.C. Massey (London: W. Harrison, 1880) and du Prel, *Philosophy of Mysticism*.

<sup>174</sup> For the significance of Kant to the scholars behind the modern occult movement, see Treitel, *A Science for the Soul* 8-9, 42.

when he concluded that the sun, not the earth, lay at the center of the universe.<sup>175</sup> They observed that Paracelsus, living in the same century as Galileo and Newton, set the foundations for antisepsis, prescriptive medicine, and microchemistry in his alchemical teachings much in the same way that his contemporaries restructured physics and astronomy.<sup>176</sup> Far from the mother of superstition and sophistry, the occult, noted many enthusiasts who identified with their predecessors, had given early-modern scientists fresh ways to expand and express their knowledge about the phenomenological universe.

While scientists, physicians, philosophers in the occult movement thought it was only a matter of time before materialist science confirmed occult phenomena, many found no reason to condescend to the fast-paced competition of professionalism. In 1910, Eduard von Hübbecke-Schleiden and the engineer Ludwig Deinhard coauthored a work entitled *Das Mysterium des Menschen im Lichte der Psychischen Forschung* (The Mystery of Man in Light of Psychical Research: An Introduction to Occultism). A comprehensive investigation on hypnosis, psychotherapy, and psychometry, Deinhard and Hübbecke-Schleiden's study was influenced by transcendental physics, transcendental psychology,<sup>177</sup> and the philosophy of their mutual friend Rudolf Steiner.<sup>178</sup> In addition, it

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<sup>175</sup> Likewise, *fin-de-siècle* occultists considered Copernican heliocentrism a portent of esoteric symbolism Alice Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology, Volume III: A Treatise on the Seven Rays* (New York, NY: Lucis Press, 1951/1970): 4-5. Medieval Renaissance polymaths distinguished little to nothing between what today would be considered astronomy and astrology, chemistry and astrology, or the spiritual and scientific. Treitel, *Avatars of the Soul*, 84n47. Du Prel, *Philosophy of Mysticism* I 3-4; II 201.

<sup>176</sup> See du Prel, *Philosophy of Mysticism* I 303-304, 307. See also du Prel, „Zur Geschichte des Okkultismus“, *Monatsschrift für die geschichtliche und experimentale Begründung der übersinnlichen Weltanschauung und monistischer Grundlage* Vol. 12, No. 67 (Juli 1891): 37-38; Franz Hartmann, „Die theosophische Gesellschaft in Indien und H.P. Blavatsky“, *Der Sphinx: Monatsschrift für die geschichtliche und experimentale Begründung der übersinnlichen Weltanschauung und monistischer Grundlage*, Vol. 12, No. 68 (Aug. 1891): 68.

<sup>177</sup> Deinhard was particularly interested in the fourth dimension, and acknowledged the importance of Zöllner's "transcendental physics" and du Prel's "transcendental psychology" in his work. See Ludwig Deinhard, „Der vierte Dimension: Eine Entgegnung“, *Der Sphinx* Vol. 12 No. 67 (Juli 1891): 52-55. For these men's association with du Prel, see Treitel, *A Science for the Soul* 40. See also Deinhard and Eduard von Hübbecke-Schleiden, *Das Mysterium des Menschen im Lichte der Psychischen Forschung: Eine Einführung in den Okkultismus* (Berlin: Verlag Reichl & Co., 1910): 149, 191-195.

<sup>178</sup> Deinhard and Hübbecke-Schleiden noted their friendship, their mutual interest in Theosophy and psychical research, and their indebtedness to Steiner in Deinhard, *Das Mysterium*. For references to the influence of Steiner, see esp.

demonstrated how mysticism—esp. Gnosticism, “the true, genuine mysticism of all time”<sup>179</sup>—whose deep teachings “at first strike us as a bit dark and abstruse,” was actually quite compatible with their application of *modern* occult science:

Unless we assist her in industrious cooperation, Nature will simply not let us in on her secrets either in the scientific-exoteric sense or in the occult-esoteric one. Indeed, in this second sense Nature is much less cooperative than in the first. Experimental psychical research requires, as we have seen, an unusual degree of patience and perseverance to achieve truly positive results, as well as strenuous effort, self-control, courage, and confidence in order to develop a psychical researcher in the esoteric sense. Whether one succeeds sooner or later, in this or in his next life on earth, depends entirely on the willpower of individuality that aspires to that particular development.<sup>180</sup>

A discovery in psychical research was likened to private revelation, a sacred purpose, and the psychic destiny of the scientist himself—in a word, a moment of gnosis. While Deinhard and Hübbe-Schleiden admitted esotericism and mysticism advance “somewhat differently” than psychical research, their work drew overt parallels between their occupation and the mystery school tradition of Greece and Egypt, alluding not only to their own initiatory elitism but also certain understandings about soul evolution, reincarnation, and cosmic law. In this epoch or the next, science and technology would manifest their knowledge, unveil the existence of the psyche, and verify the miracles in ancient religious texts and the clairvoyance of Hindu fakirs, Jewish Kabbalists, and Christian saints.<sup>181</sup>

<sup>179</sup> Siebentes Kapitel: Esoterik in Gegenwart.”

<sup>179</sup> Original in context: „Die Gnosis, d.h. die wahre, echte Mystik aller Zeiten, ist die Kunst, Gott in sich selbst zu finden“ (Deinhard, *Das Mysterium* 245).

<sup>180</sup> Origin. German: „Die Natur weicht uns eben nicht, ohne dass wir sie darin durch unser emsiges Zutun unterstützen, in ihre tiefsten Geheimnisse ein, weder im exoterisch-wissenschaftlichen noch im esoterisch-okkulten Sinne. In letzterem Sinne noch sehr viel weniger als in erstem. Erfordert schon, wie wir gesehen haben, die psychische Experimentalforschung einen ungewöhnlichen Grad von Geduld und Ausdauer, um wirklich positive Resultate zu erzielen, Anstrengung und Selbstbeherrschung, Mut und Selbstvertrauen dazu, um sich zu einem psychischen Forscher im esoterischen Sinne zu entwickeln. Ob dies früher oder später, in diesem oder erst in einem späteren Erdenleben gelingt, dies hängt natürlich ganz und gar von der Willensanstrengung der Individualität ab, die solche Entwicklung anstrebt.“ Deinhard, *Das Mysterium* 247-248; see also 243-247.

<sup>181</sup> This notion was, as they noted, hardly new. Acquainted with Gnostic teachings and their emphasis on the mystical in

Scientists and physicians were not the only scholars convinced by this argument about mystics and saints. In fact, by the eve of the Great War, Andrzej Niemojewski thought sufficient proof had arrived. Drawn by his interest in astronomy to the prestigious Treptow Observatory at Berlin in April 1911, Niemojewski marveled when the director Dr. F.S. Archenhold introduced him to a cathode tube illuminated by X-rays. Placing his hand on the opposite side of the glass, he watched as exposure to the wavelength revealed a fiery red emanation about his flesh, its glow fading from sight as he withdrew his hand. Using this instance to debunk naturalist explanations for the haloes and nimbus depicted in religious writings and artwork, Niemojewski was convinced that X-ray equipment possessed the sophistication to magnify the subtle frequency of psychic energy surrounding the human body. Such technology, he added, evidenced the occult idea that latent spiritual powers lay in all people and are not simply conjured up by prophets, magicians, and saints.<sup>182</sup> Strides in twentieth-century science thus clarified and transliterated a premodern riddle lurking behind myths, folklore, and Christian hagiography.

Looking forward to further recognition of transcendental realities, Niemojewski's enthusiasm for breakthroughs in disciplined investigation only grew. Two years later he concluded that specialized areas of science had catalyzed the revelation of the numinous powers underlying the universe and man. Because professionalism made the

the human experience, du Prel wrote: "What is a miracle from one standpoint of one half of the world can belong to law from the standpoint of the universe. The clairvoyance of somnambules [sic.] is therefore a miracle for 'enlightened' journalists, much as telegraphy is a miracle for savages" (du Prel, *Philosophy of Mysticism* II, 151). Du Prel explicitly referred to the teachings of the Gnostics in the Judeo-Christian tradition, viz. the creation myth in Genesis, in order to explain that, not entirely contrary to orthodox Christian doctrine, the present the human species as descendants from either paradisiacal humanoids fallen by metaphysical sin into corporeal existence. In a two-part article in 1892, he linked this mystical teaching of man's primordial existence to similar myths in Hinduism (du Prel, "Die Seelenlehre, II," 216-224). See also du Prel, *Philosophy of Mysticism* I 117, 162-163.

<sup>182</sup> Andrzej Niemojewski, *Astrale Geheimnisse des Christentums* (Frankfurt am Main: Neuer Frankfurter Verlag GmbH, 1913): 86-87.

phenomenological world intelligible through disciplined fields of study, its practice was, in addition to the life reform of the occult movement, analogous to the pedagogical representations of Jesus found in the Gospels:

The subtle detections of the footsteps of the Lord, of Yahweh, of Christ, and of fate (all the same), are only a prototype of today's explorations of the footsteps of Nature—to discover her secrets and to live accordingly. Instead of the books “On the Imitation of Christ,” there appear publications entitled “Back to Nature.” And instead of the gospel writers of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, there appear physiologists, biologists, neurologists, pathologists, etc. We do not mean that a greater genius existed either in the past or even in the present. There are simply particular applications that correspond to different points of reference and different periods in time.<sup>183</sup>

Since Jesus himself was the metonym for the cosmic force that materialized itself and assumed bodily form, Christology confirmed that man's relationship with “the Word made flesh” represented his own corporeal existence and rapport with the phenomenological universe. For this reason, Niemojewski could but praise specialization in the natural sciences alongside “the theoretical and especially practical study which has been recently developed in the occult sciences, that is: alchemy, astrology, Hermetic philosophy, magic, Kabbalah, psychurgy, and theurgy.”<sup>184</sup> A consequence of modernism, the formalization of both occult and natural sciences reflected man's timeless endeavor to organize and articulate the meaning of himself and the universe around him.

But while leaders of the modern occult movement praised specialization for its effectiveness, they also critiqued its competitive industrial output as an abuse of nature. Lamenting that specialists only used such knowledge to further industry and technology

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<sup>183</sup> Original: „Das Erspähen der Fußtapfen des Herrn, Jahve, Christus, des Fatums, ganz einerlei, ist nur eine Urform des heutigen Erforschens der Fußtapfen der Natur, um ihre Geheimnisse zu entdecken und danach zu leben. Anstatt der Bücher ‚Über die Nachahmung Christi‘ erscheinen Drucke mit dem Titel ‚Zurück zur Natur‘. Und anstatt der Evangelien von Matthäus, Markus, Lukas und Johannes erscheinen Physiologien, Biologien, Neurologen, Pathologien usw./ Meinen wir nicht, daß mehr Genie in den letzteren als in den ersteren vorhanden sei, oder aber ... umgekehrt. Es sind nur andere Ausgangspunkte und eine andere den Zeiten entsprechendere Anwendung.“ See Niemojewski, *Astral Geheimnisse* 138-139.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid. 139.

based on material gain and profit, du Prel argued that, instead of relegating such phenomena to the strictly natural, specialists should investigate whether the anomalies they stumbled upon were in reality verifiable proofs for extrasensory phenomena that stitch transcendental reality together. Were all scientists to accept the evidence, he wrote, they would understand “[t]he world is therefore our representation. Materialism is self-refuted by its latest researches; it has sown away the bough on which it sat.”<sup>185</sup> Similarly, Niemojewski observed that, paradoxically, that “the impetuous development of science and technology has given rise to a new era in which the form of human existence [*menschlichen Daseins*] as well as a prevailing transformation in thought [*Gedankenumbildung*.]” This made it difficult for modern-day people to understand how for centuries Christian thinkers conceived the phenomenological world through “the footsteps of the Lord.”<sup>186</sup>

Still, more subdued occultists argued the vast disparity between the normal and the paranormal exceeded the reaches of modern science, though in theory the two were inextricably linked. According to Rudolf Steiner and Theodor Reuss, in spite of all evidence contradicting their theories, convinced materialists would continue to deny the existence of a transcendental cosmos even when evidence suggested otherwise.<sup>187</sup> During a lecture in 1908, Steiner stated that, in addition to new innovations in science and technology, man’s own cognition must attune itself to the mundane yet subtle

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<sup>185</sup> Du Prel, *Philosophy of Mysticism* II 264.

<sup>186</sup> Niemojewski, Astral Geheimnisse 138. Niemojewski’s sentiments resonate with the words of du Prel, who in 1885 called for vocational reform that would broaden future scientists’ endeavors instead of pressuring them to draw conclusions on unknown variables (Du Prel, *Philosophy of Mysticism* I 14).

<sup>187</sup> During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, German materialists such as the physiologist Emil Dubois-Reymond, the physicist Herman von Helmholtz, and physiologist Carl Ludwig attempted to explain away occult and vitalist theories through sheer physics, chemistry, and biology. Du Prel and others took it upon themselves to refute materialism through epistemology as well as psychical research. See Treitel, *A Science for the Soul* 34-35; 349. Treitel, *Avatars of the Soul: Cultures of Science, Medicine, and the Occult in Modern Germany* (Cambridge: UMI, 1999): 69-70. See also Ellic Howe, “Theodor Reuss: Irregular Freemasonry in Germany, 1900-23,” *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 91 (1978): 28-46.

influences of occult forces in the phenomenological world. While extolling the achievements of technology and science as a catalyst to self-knowledge vis-à-vis the cosmos, he marked material-mindedness a high price for suppressing man's psychical faculties:

Man has devoted enormous spiritual force to inventing the steamship, the railway, and the telephone, but what does he use these for? What a mass of spirit is thus diverted from life for the higher worlds. The spiritual scientist understands this and does not criticize in our time, because he knows that it was necessary to conquer the physical plane. Yet it is true that the spirit has plunged down into the physical world. Is it important for the spirit that, instead of grinding our own corn in a quern, we should be able to call Hamburg by long-distance telephone and order what we want to be sent from America by steamer?<sup>188</sup>

In order to activate his own perception of occult forces, Steiner asserted, incarnate man must first recognize that, by having devoted his psychical powers to conquering the physical plane, he has in fact enslaved himself to the physical plane in his search for quantifiable proofs.<sup>189</sup>

Similar to the scholars and mystics throughout German-speaking Europe who supported the occult, the filmmakers behind Weimar science fiction sought to reconcile conceptual strains of science and the occult, which, until the previous century, had maintained respect in scholarly circles both scientific and literary alike. In order to evoke the both past and present in the premises behind their films, Brennert, Galeen, Köhne, Kornblum, Lang, and von Harbou associated visualizations of towers and pyramids of ancient occultists with sterilized environments of scientific progress (observatories and laboratories) and stocked their narratives with detailed scientific facts from the postwar industrial age. With their interplay of science and occultism, as well as the ancient and

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<sup>188</sup> Rudolf Steiner, Norman Macbeth, trans., *Egyptian Myths and Mysteries* (Spring Valley, NY: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1971): 83.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid. 83.

the modern, their films' prologues—and their plots—underscore rather remarkable development of the displaced status of the occult sciences during the *fin de siècle*.

While further research must investigate how invested these future filmmakers were in the occult sciences of the early twentieth century, there is much that suggests that they would have become familiar with enthusiasts of scientific occultism in their childhoods and early adulthood. After having exhausted his boyhood taste in German science fiction authors Willi Gail, Kurd Lasswitz (pseudonym Velatus), and especially Hans Dominik, around the turn of the century an adolescent Lang turned his reading interests to, in addition to crime novellas, literature on the occult. In fact, his films such as *Das indische Grabmal* (The Indian Tomb, 1920) and *Dr. Mabuse: Der Spieler* (Dr. Mabuse: The Gambler, 1921), both written by Thea von Harbou, would juxtapose technological-utopian apparatuses to Indian mysticism in ways reminiscent of both Dominik and the research of the occultists mentioned above.<sup>190</sup>

Other future filmmakers seem to have had direct connections with leaders in the occult movement. In the winter of 1898, for example, Hans Brennert presented alongside Rudolf Steiner in a lecture series on the changing status and proper placement of the human ego in modernity. More investigation must go into this conference, which was apparently a grand affair. Its presenters consisted of a motley collection of notable German intellectuals including the liberal politician Hjalmar Schlacht, the anarchist Walther Borgius, the dramatist Paul Ernst, the writer Wilhelm Bölsche, and the

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<sup>190</sup> Patrick McGilligan, *Fritz Lang: The Nature of the Beast* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997/2003): 16-17.

psychoanalyst and novelist Lou Andreas-Salomé. Brennert in particular discussed the evolution of egotism in love between the sexes.<sup>191</sup>

Given their personal investment in matters of mysticism and consciousness, it is not unlikely that these men and women were also familiar with the some 41 occult periodicals printed in Germany during the quarter century before the Weimar Republic. The professionals mentioned above published the bulk of their research and theories in such periodicals as Franz Hartmann's *Lothusblüthen* (1892-1900/1908-1915), Carl du Prel's *Der Sphinx* (1886-1896), Eduard von Hartmann's *Neue Metaphysische Rundschau* (1896-1917), and Rudolf Steiner's *Luzifer-Gnosis* (1903-1908).<sup>192</sup> Not unlike the sensationalist literature and adventure serials of the time, these periodicals certainly foreshadowed the prominent plot artifices of Weimar-era science fiction, including telekinesis, hypnotism and trance, and clairvoyance. Living as young educated adults in urban German-speaking Europe at the time, the would-be creators of Weimar science fiction cinema would have been well acquainted with the controversial discoveries and innovations that made many Europeans question their identity during the first two decades of the century.

#### THE FANTASTIC AS MYSTIC EXPRESSION

Besides these generalized and speculative connections to famous occultists and their writings, however, there is more substantial evidence that Galeen, Lang, and von Harbou were directly inspired by the occult, the ancient, and the Orient. Into the Weimar years, many of their closest colleagues and friends had been in the center of the revival of

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<sup>191</sup> See esp. Hanns Brennert, "Vom Egoismus in der Liebe," in Arthur Dix, ed., *Der Egoismus* (Leipzig: Verlag von Freund & Wittig, 1899): 293-302. See also Rudolf Steiner, „Der Egoismus in Philosophie,“ in Dix: 306-346.

<sup>192</sup> See "Appendix D" in Treitel, *A Science for the Soul* 270-273.

Gnosticism in the *fin de siècle*, found inspiration in the occult, and made significant contributions to their scripts and film sets. Indeed, these included some of the most notable—and, in hindsight, most forgotten—German-speaking authors and artists of the fantastic. As the years after the war witnessed a populist movement towards the esoteric, the arcane, and the occult, these filmmakers frequently referred to the literary traditions and works of these creative minds in order to intertwine their own knowledge about spiritual wisdom of the ancient Orient with the modern occult sciences. Throughout their careers, Galeen, Lang, and von Harbou employed scientific research, ancient wisdom, and cultures of the East that were greatly indebted to other German-speaking writers and artists of the fantastic.

### *Illumination of the Page*

Hanns Heinz Ewers, Alfred Kubin, Gustav Meyrink, and Karl Hans Strobl were foundational to the fantasy genre in the early twentieth century. Their short stories, poems, and artwork shared a penchant for horrors of the night, illness, insanity, torture, murder, and death—all which became strong motifs in German Expressionism.<sup>193</sup> Publishing most their works between 1901 and 1921, their easy-to-read stories were never far from the science, psychology, and occultism that would later characterize Weimar science fiction, nor were their personal interests in the ancient Orient unlike those of the filmmakers. While, as noted above, there were certainly other writers who influenced the creators of German science-fiction cinema, these four figures are most

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<sup>193</sup> Schuetz 16. Outside a limited readership on the literature by these authors, this remains the primary source for this study's discussion of Ewers, Kubin, Meyrink, and Strobl. Extensive research must be conducted on the personal lives of these writers and their varied experiences and dealings in the ancient Orient, the occult, and Gnosticism.

notable because their easy-to-read eerie tales and bizarre illustrations had become icons in German-speaking pulp-fiction culture in the two decades before the Weimar Republic.

Though Ewers himself did not illustrate his stories, the estranged and disturbing artwork that Kubin, Meyrink, and Strobl produced for their literature bears an uncanny resemblance to the shadows, skewed perspectives, and psychological angst said to characterize the sets of expressionist films of the 1920s.<sup>194</sup> Because contemporaries drew these connections between their stories and artwork and the German cinema, these writers' distinct stylistic approach to the fantastic helped set German-speaking Europeans' expectations for the genre, and helped influence the movie industry itself. In addition to their professional appeal, Ewers, Kubin, Meyrink, and Strobl deserve closer examination because, much like their counterparts who later entered the film industry, they were themselves products of their own time.<sup>195</sup> A brief investigation demonstrates that they often shared the same sources of inspiration for their eerie tales and grotesque illustrations as the screenwriters and directors who immediately succeeded them in portrayals of the fantastic.

While on average they were a few years older than the filmmakers, these four writers were born between 1868 and 1878. None published a literary work until the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>196</sup> This occurrence is significant, since, in addition to the revival of Gnosticism and the rediscovery of the ancient world, the turn of the twentieth century in German-speaking Europe also marked a rediscovery of E.T.A. Hoffmann, the

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<sup>194</sup> Contemporaries sometimes compared the visuals in early German Expressionist film with the artworks of Kubin and Meyrink. In fact, the houses in Galeen's *Der Golem* were no doubt taken from Meyrink's novel of the same name. See Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After* 62.

<sup>195</sup> For a thorough investigation regarding these and other German-speaking authors of the fantastic and questions of identity, see Peter Horwath, "The Erosion of 'Gemeinschaft': German Writers in Prague, 1890-1924," *German Studies Review* 4 (Feb. 1981): 9-37.

<sup>196</sup> Schuetz 58.

dissemination of Edgar Allan Poe, and a renewed interest in painters like Pieter Breughel the Elder and Hieronymus Bosch—all which certainly influenced the narratives and illustration styles of these aspiring authors.<sup>197</sup> Though their works did not always take place in the modern age, Ewers, Kubin, Meyrink, and Strobl attempted to portray the uncertainty and contradiction of the human experience with a mixture of Romanticism and the parapsychic phenomena prefigured in the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Gerard de Nerval, and Charles Baudelaire. And, to convey the estranged psyches of their characters, they often reached for the occult and mythological motifs used by symbolist painters like Arnold Böcklin and Max Klinger, and writers such as the Frenchman Villiers de l'Isle Adam.<sup>198</sup>

Before their writing careers, Ewers, Kubin, and Meyrink exhibited strong interests in the occult. While claiming to have no personal occult experience, Ewers was reportedly seized by a reaction against Naturalism from 1895 to 1899. During this time, he turned his attention to philosophy, mysticism, medical psychology, and the occult sciences.<sup>199</sup> At the age of twenty-three, Meyrink had been on the verge of suicide when a pamphlet on Theosophy was shoved under his apartment door.<sup>200</sup> Despite some reservations, he immediately discovered an allure in all things occult. A member of a theosophical club, “Zum blauen Stern” (To the Blue Star), in Prague, he became skeptical attender of séances and exposer of fraud and wrote numerous articles supporting the validity of occult phenomena and the afterlife.<sup>201</sup> But while Meyrink’s introduction to occultism

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<sup>197</sup> These authors often composed articles in praise of the artists and writers who inspired their own works. They even translated stories and poems of Poe’s into German and published them in their own periodicals. See Schuetz 22-23, 27, 55-56, 106.

<sup>198</sup> Schuetz 37.

<sup>199</sup> Schuetz 42.

<sup>200</sup> Schuetz 40-41. See also Treitel, *A Science for the Soul* 69, 109.

<sup>201</sup> Schuetz 98, 108-109.

allegedly saved his life, Kubin's first encounter almost cost him his. As a young man in 1896, Kubin yielded to peer pressure by volunteering as the subject for a hypnotist. This experience contributed, along with other incidents, to the permanently jangled state of his nerves. Shortly thereafter, in a state of despair, he made an unsuccessful attempted suicide at his mother's graveside.<sup>202</sup>

In addition, Meyrink and Kubin made the acquaintance of other German-speaking authors who turned to the occult and mysticism for inspiration during the *fin de siècle*. In the 1890s, Meyrink became a member of the so-called the Prague Marcionists, an intimate circle of writers, including Franz Kafka, Max Brod, and Franz Werfel, who interwove the mystical themes of Gnostic texts into their tales of the existential problem of the individual.<sup>203</sup> Although Kubin also became familiar with authors who dabbled in the occult and Gnosticism, including Kafka and Werfel, he apparently derived little to no direct inspiration from these venues himself. This, of course, does not imply that Kubin did not view the world in a mystical way. In 1931, Kubin wrote that the one who knows that this world is an illusion, a mere veil covering the abyss of chaos, must encounter the world with a sense of humor. However sardonic this observation may be, Kubin's comment suggests his own transcendentalist worldview and mystical inclinations. But rather than occult sciences and mysticism, the human experience in his stories was filled with ghosts, phantoms, and demons.<sup>204</sup>

Still, Kubin certainly kept close contact with colleagues and acquaintances engaged in

<sup>202</sup> Schuetz 40-41.

<sup>203</sup> Schuetz 88-89. For more on Meyrink's affiliation with the Prague Marcionists, see "Chapter 18: The Marcionists at Prague" in William M. Johnston, *The Austrian Mind: An Intellectual and Social History, 1848-1938* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1972): 265-273. Prague was the home of many German-speaking writers fascinated with the mystical, and many of these writers, including Meyrink, often frequented multiple occult circles. See esp. Horwath's article, esp. the section 'Gnostic Elements,' 33-37.

<sup>204</sup> Schuetz 107-108; 116, 118.

these heterodox ideas. Most of these relationships were strictly business, others more intimate. Noted for his artistic skill, Kubin was hired to illustrate the works of Werfel and Oskar A.H. Schmitz, which were steeped in occult themes. In addition to being a novelist and lawyer, Schmitz was an occultist noted for his research in astrology and horoscopes.<sup>205</sup> Not only was Schmitz a giant in the modern occult movement for the first third of the twentieth century, he was also married to Kubin's sister. Kubin and Schmitz maintained a lifelong relationship and frequently discussed one another's literary works. Also, Schmitz was notable for his correspondence with other occultists and writers of the fantastic. In 1907, he suggested the title for Kubin's celebrated novel, *Die Andere Seite* (The Other Side, 1908), a story whose central themes include the seamless transition between dream and reality, recognition of the duality of the world, and the unity of its opposites—very Gnostic themes, indeed.<sup>206</sup> While vacationing at a spa near Dresden in summer of 1901, Schmitz met for the first time Gustav Meyrink and encouraged the unpublished author to write down and publish his short stories.<sup>207</sup> Thus, writers in the occult movement such as Schmitz played integral roles in motivating novice writers in bringing their works to public access.

This shove in the direction of the occult sometimes compelled authors to vigorous pursuits. Meyrink, for example, became known for venting his spiritual beliefs through articles in the popular satirical journal *Simplizissimus*, for which he wrote and edited short stories. After the Great War, his longer works became increasingly burdened by his occult philosophy of the release of man's spiritual being from the confines of the material

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<sup>205</sup> Schuetz 107, 109.

<sup>206</sup> Though further research must determine to what extent, if at all, this work pulls from Gnostic literature, the description of this story and its themes is convincingly inspired by Gnosticism. See Schuetz 102. It was certainly influenced by the occult tales of Strobl and Max Brod. See Horwath 29.

<sup>207</sup> Schuetz 86.

world—as seen in his first novel *Der Golem* (The Golem, 1915), as well as his later novels *Das grüne Gesicht* (The Green Face, 1916), *Walpurgisnacht* (1917), *Der weiße Dominikaner* (The White Dominican, 1921), and *Der Engel vom westlichen Fenster* (The Angel of the West Window, 1927).<sup>208</sup> In 1921, one critic described Meyrink as turning “the occult-mystical story into an occult treatise that is but poorly disguised as a story or novel.”<sup>209</sup>

Into the 1920s, these authors assembled anthologies of short stories and apocryphal histories with occult overtones. In 1917, Strobl published a collection of eerie tales by Leonhard Adelt, Richard Teschner, and himself entitled *Lemuria: Seltsame Geschichten* (Lemuria: Strange Stories). As discussed in Chapter One, Lemuria was the name of one of the prehistoric ‘great cultures,’ which, according to the teachings of Anthroposophy, Theosophy, and Rosicrucianism, was supposedly inhabited by a hermaphroditic reptilian species that had corrupted itself by interbreeding with another species which taught black magic.<sup>210</sup> While Strobl’s stories make no explicit reference to Lemuria, his illustration for the cover page—a disease-ridden creature nursing its parasitic young—evoke the almost pathological turmoil in Germany and the impending threat to its own survival in the struggles of the Great War (Fig. 2.5). Likewise, Meyrink’s preoccupation with occult philosophies became reflected in a number of works he edited and translated. Among them was a five-volume series called *Romane und Bücher der Magie* (Novels and Books of Magic, 1921). It included biographies of an Indian prophet and a Kabbalist as well as novels dealing with the Rosicrucians and necromancy. Meyrink was also profoundly

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<sup>208</sup> See Schuetz 90, 91-92. For more on the influence of Kabbalah and Buddhism on these works, see Horwath 29-30.

<sup>209</sup> Original: „Meyrink ging ‚den Weg von der okkultistisch-geheimnisvollen Erzählung zum okkultischen Traktat, das nur schlecht als Erzählung oder Roman getarnt ist‘.“ Cited in Schuetz 92.

<sup>210</sup> Karl Hans Strobl; Leonhard Adelt, and Richard Teschner. *Lemuria: Seltsame Geschichten* (München: Müller Verlag GmbH, 1917).

interested in alchemy. In 1925 he translated Thomas Aquinas' *De Lapide Philosophico* and published a collection of his own *Goldmachergeschichten* (Tales about the Transmutation of Gold, 1925).<sup>211</sup>

In most cases, this interest in the occult was almost invariably linked to the ancient Orient and Eastern philosophy. While little can be found on Strobl's involvement with the occult firsthand, his stories and art were primarily influenced by Buddhism as he grappled with its philosophical implications for Westerners. At the turn of the century, Strobl considered the artist as a generator of ideas, deriving a parallel between Buddhism and the philosophy of modern art in the artist's relationship to the external world. Since, according to Strobl, the artist is—like the world soul of Gnosticism—the center around which all things revolve, the artist's creative impulse is primarily a drive to fill the external world with his own consciousness. Modern art traced its penchant to self-dissection and individualistic mystique through E.T.A. Hoffmann, Edgar Allan Poe, and reached its culmination in Nietzsche. But it was not just the individualistic attitude within contemporary art that Strobl believed derived ultimately from Buddhism. Modern art's social consciousness also shared a Buddhist characteristic, for Buddhism considered all men part of the world soul and therefore worthy of sympathy.<sup>212</sup>

Similar to Strobl's affinity for Eastern philosophy, Kubin and Meyrink were drawn to Buddhism. Following another crisis in March 1916, Kubin turned to Buddhism for spiritual sustenance. Adopting a lifestyle of complete asceticism, he withdrew from all contact with all people. However, the crisis and his commitment to Buddhism lasted for

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<sup>211</sup> Alchemy was also a dominant theme in his *Der Engel vom westlichen Fenster*. By the late twenties, however, these books fell out of favor with the general public. Schuetz 97.

<sup>212</sup> Schuetz 63-65.

only ten days, and Kubin soon left his apartment.<sup>213</sup> During the 1920s, Meyrink devoted himself to the teachings of the easternized theosophist Bo Yin Ra, formerly the painter Joseph Anton Schneiderfranken. Returning to Germany from extensive travels in 1914, Bo Yin Ra became a spiritual guru who offered Theosophists a fresh take on reality, “a totally new way of seeing and hearing,” and his goal as an artist to translate his spiritual teachings into physical form.<sup>214</sup> Compatible with the teachings of Steiner, Bo Yin Ra’s value of his vocational expression as a spiritual outlet greatly resembled Meyrink’s own methodology in writing fiction, which, as we have seen, was obvious to his critics and readers. In 1927, after years of intense study, Meyrink finally converted to Mahajana Buddhism, and, upon his death in 1932, was buried according to Buddhist rite by his friend, the Munich Buddhist Ludwig Held.<sup>215</sup>

Ewers possessed a morbid curiosity about the traditions of Hindu and Buddhist culture and the exotica of the Orient. In a book entitled *Indien und Ich* (India and I, 1911), Ewers turned full attention to the strange sights and customs he had observed during his extensive travels. Immensely popular in Europe, the book underwent nine printings by 1913.<sup>216</sup> In addition to the book itself, Ewers gave lectures about this exotic land that, for him, was a reservoir of inspiration for the fantastic and bizarre. As he wrote: “What is to me India—indeed that is not on these pages. Whoever is interested in it may perhaps read about it later, in some highly absurd novel, some wild, all-too-strange story—that good citizens will not read because it would rob them of a well-deserved night’s rest.”<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Schuetz 109.

<sup>214</sup> Treitel, *A Science for the Soul* 128-131.

<sup>215</sup> Schuetz 98, 108.

<sup>216</sup> See Schuetz 74n25.

<sup>217</sup> Original: „Was mir Indien ist—steht freilich nicht auf diesen Seiten. Wen das interessiert, der mag es vielleicht später einmal lesen, in irgendeinem höchst absurdem Roman, irgendeiner wilden, allzu seltsamen Geschichte—die gute Bürger nicht lesen werden, weil sie ihnen die vollverdiente Nachtruhe rauben würden.“ See Schuetz 77-79.

Ultimately, Ewers wished to exploit his audience's purient interests in advertising his monograph, just as he did in his stories and novels, which exploited carnal perversions ranging from homoeroticism to necromancy and from beastiality to child molestation. Likewise in *India and I*, he emphasized the most bizarre aspects of Indian life, and he particularly highlighted the sexual side of Indian cults.<sup>218</sup>

While at present the evidence of what the filmmakers of Weimar science fiction knew about the ancient Orient remains largely confined to their films, writers of science fiction such as Meyrink and Ewers took interest in the prominent *Ordo Templi Orientis*. Allegedly, Meyrink became acquainted with the chemist Carl Kellner as a patient at Franz Hartmann's sanitarium in Hallein. But however they met, by 1907 Meyrink expressed his dislike of Kellner's personal character in an article.<sup>219</sup> Likewise, Ewers formed his own ambivalent relationship with Aleister Crowley, whose erotic-occult poetry the former read as inspiration in his own literature. Since Ewers spoke fluent English as well as German, Crowley purportedly requested the writer to translate certain rituals, such as Crowley's "Gnostic Mass," for the O.T.O. into German. Because there is no evidence that Ewers became a member of the O.T.O. himself, this account remains apocryphal.<sup>220</sup> While his adventures to China and India play hardly any role in his literature, Ewers repeatedly commented on the Orient as one of his chief reservoirs for his musings on the bizarre and grotesque.

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<sup>218</sup> Schuetz discusses Ewers' sadomasochistic writing style at length. See esp. Schuetz 147-156.

<sup>219</sup> Dvorak. See also Daniël van Egmond, "Western Esoteric Schools in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," in *Gnosis and Hermeticism* 336.

<sup>220</sup> The source that offers the greatest potential evidence, Wilfried Kugel, *Der Unverantwortliche: das Leben des Hanns Heinz Ewers* (Grupello Verlag: Bruno Kehrein, 1992), remains unobtainable in the United States. However, limited access via Google Books reveals that Ewers had strong ties with the O.T.O. and Aleister Crowley, especially during the Great War. For Crowley reference, see 242. See also 411: "In approximately 1906 came Ewers probably about Stanislaw Przybyszewski, Gustav Meyrink, Max Ferdinand Theodor Reuss Sebalt and in contact with Berlin 'Oriental Templar Order' ('O.T.O.')."

As mentioned above, Galeen's film *Alraune* was based on Hans Heinz Ewers' novel *Alraune: Die Geschichte eines lebendigen Wesens* (Mandrake: The Story of a Living Being, 1911). But though Galeen consulted Ewers in adapting the novel for his screenplay in 1927, by this time these two men had already been acquainted with one another since at least two years after the first edition of the novel. In 1913, Galeen collaborated with Ewers to write an original screenplay that would utilize the technical trappings of cinematic technology to reproduce occult phenomena on film. The result was *Der Student von Prag* (1913), a story about a rambunctious college student during the *Biedermeier* era who trades a mysterious old man his mirror image for limitless wealth. In the course of his overindulgence, the student becomes haunted upon discovering that his mirror image is running rampant committing crimes. The commercial success of this drama would lead Galeen to remake the film under the same title in 1926. Again, for the screenplay he consulted Ewers, who quickly expanded on the original version with even more themes of the occult and the sexual perversions so characteristic of his own prewar literature.<sup>221</sup>

Writing the screenplay for another fantasy in 1920, Galeen borrowed the premise from Gustav Meyrink's landmark novel *Der Golem* (The Golem, 1915). Galeen's version, *Der Golem: wie er in der Welt kam* (The Golem: How He Came into the World, 1920), tells of a medieval Kabbalist who, foreseeing persecution of his ghetto in the stars, creates a golem to protect his community. As with the mandrake legend in *Alraune*, the plot centers on alchemy and astrology. But unlike *Alraune*, this plot is set in the distant

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<sup>221</sup> Schuetz 16.

past.<sup>222</sup> Yet the time, location, and the dramatic tropes in *Der Golem* and the original *Der Student von Prag* demonstrate how Galeen and Ewers attempted to translate traditional horror and fantasy from the literature of the Romantics onto a medium for the twentieth century. Not only does this stylistic approach demonstrate filmmakers' pioneering attempts to elevate cinema to the level of high culture,<sup>223</sup> it also foreshadows how science-fiction directors Galeen, Werckmeister, and Kornblum would later juxtapose the highly expressionistic sets to naturalistic landscapes in *Algol*, *Wunder der Schöpfung*, and *Alraune*. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, this lucid sense of the real and the unreal holds occult significance for these cinematic fantasies.

Since at least the earliest days of the Great War, Meyrink and Ewers exerted a particularly strong influence on Weimar science fiction of Galeen as a screenwriter and director, while Strobl and Kubin were inspired by and resembled the cinematic visuals of Lang and Werckmeister. The works of Strobl, Ewers, Meyrink, and Kubin are marked examples of the *fin-de-siècle* penchant to the fantastic and the concomitant rediscovery of the irrational, fed by a mixture of avant-garde artwork, occultism, and psychology, as well as from modern science and technology. Despite their divergent paths of artistic development before the turn of the century, that they derived inspiration for their literature in similar spiritual and scientific venues should not be discounted as coincidence. Grotesque and macabre, there is no doubt that, in the production of their films, the creators of Weimar science fiction cinema were aware of these writers, their bizarre stories, and their disturbing artwork.

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<sup>222</sup> Both Galeen and Wegener attempted to translate Meyrink and Ewers' estranged writing styles onto the screen in their *Der Golem*, *Der Student von Prag*, and *Alraune*.

<sup>223</sup> Contemporaries were very aware of this attempt by filmmakers to market their films as artwork, as products of high culture. See, for example, the comments by Siegfried Kracauer on Lang and von Harbou's *Spione* (Spies, 1928) in Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After* 49-50.

### *Illumination of the Screen*

There remains little known about the numerous pioneer filmmakers in Germany whose involvement with the occult, the ancient Orient, and Gnosticism blurred the lines between the creative process of their vocation and something far more personal. Perhaps the greatest example of such filmmakers are the actor and director Paul Wegener and the set designers and artists Albin Grau and Werner Graul, all who were personally acquainted and had collaborated with Henrik Galeen, Fritz Lang, and Thea von Harbou.<sup>224</sup> Much like the predecessors to Weimar science fiction, these filmmakers kept their interests in the occult no secret, and it is likely that the occult highly influenced their collaborations on the set.

A fellow pioneer filmmaker, Wegener worked alongside Galeen in virtually all his films dealing with the supernatural. Having met Galeen in Max Reinhardt's German Theater around 1906, Wegener's greatest contribution to the director's filmography would include his talented performances.<sup>225</sup> In addition to his contributions to the screenplays for the original *Der Student von Prag*, *Der Golem*, and *Alraune*, Wegener played the leading male roles in each of these films: the loathsome student Baulduin; the unwieldy and vindictive golem; and the spiteful Privy Councilor ten Brinken. As these characteristics suggest, in his film career Wegener became typecast as an antihero. In

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<sup>224</sup> R. Bruce Elder, "Gnostic Lang," in Robert Haller, ed. *Fritz Lang 2000* (New York, NY: Anthology Film Archives, 2000): 52. This remains the only known source to approach Lang's use of Gnostic symbolism throughout the filmmaker's career in Weimar Germany. It is, however, replete with general statements and poor citation. It is also a very brief discussion covering only a few pages. In contrast, this study seeks to expound on its arguments and to find further ways in which Lang engaged with occult phenomena as they pertain to self-knowledge.

<sup>225</sup> For a thorough investigation of Max Reinhardt's relationship with Wegener during the *fin de siècle*, see "Chapter Three: The Spell of the Light: The Influence of Max Reinhardt" in Lotte H. Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1952/1973); see esp. 39-63. There is also brief discussion of their partnership and involvement with Reinhardt's troupe in Anton Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009): 88-89.

addition, his characters are always simultaneously affected and driven by occult forces.

Wegener's performances in international cinema followed this trend, such as U.S. director Rex Ingram's *The Magician* (1926).<sup>226</sup> In it, Wegener played a modern student of surgery who, versed with occult practices, seeks the blood of a female patient in order to create life.

Wegener's celebrated performance as an obsessed surgical student may have prompted Galeen and Ewers to adapt *Alraune* for the screen. But while the content of both the film and novel versions of *Alraune* was based on a rather general knowledge of Western esotericism, there is much evidence to suggest that Ewers, Meyrink, and Wegener's own personal interests regarding Eastern mysticism, Gnosticism, and the occult may have influenced this science fiction film. Currently there is little evidence that Galeen himself was involved with the revival of Gnosticism during the early years of the twentieth century, but his films exude a vast knowledge of the occult and esotericism that he perhaps derived as a member of the Order of the Rosicrucians.<sup>227</sup> Moreover, he had certainly been introduced to its themes and motifs through work with his colleagues and forerunners in the science fiction proto-genre. Since his earliest films, Wegener imbued his career in cinema with occult themes. In *Der Yogi* (The Yogi, 1916), for example, he played the role of a fakir and young inventor. Working as both director and actor, Wegener found this film provided him with the opportunity to accommodate three

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<sup>226</sup> Rex Ingram, *The Magician*. DVD. Directed by Max Ingram. 1926 (Hollywood, CA: Metro-Goldwyn, 2010).

<sup>227</sup> For evidence of Galeen's Rosicrucian membership, see the documentary, "The Language of Shadows," in *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* (orig. *Nosferatu: Eine Symphonie des Grauens*). DVD. Directed by F.W. Murnau. 1920 (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2000).

of his chief interests: trick photography (it was one of the first films to feature invisibility), clairvoyance, and Eastern mysticism.<sup>228</sup>

A graduate from the Art Academy at Dresden, during the Weimar Republic Albin Grau had worked with such notable German Expressionists as Robert Wiene and F.W. Murnau. Like Grau, these directors not only studied astrology, clairvoyance, and other theosophical topics, they also integrated these themes into their own films.<sup>229</sup> This intimacy and mutual fascination with the occult enabled Grau to make significant aesthetic contributions to both the sets and scripts of Wiene's *Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari* (The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, 1920), Murnau's *Nosferatu: Eine Symphonie des Grauens* (Nosferatu: a Symphony of Horror, 1922), and, later, Carl Theodor Dreyer's *Vampyr* (Vampire, 1932)—all three which treat unexplained phenomena with overt medical and scientific themes in order to evidence a type of concern with the supernatural that virtually defines occultism.<sup>230</sup> However, to explicate these appeals to occult phenomena and esoteric philosophy exceeds the scope of the present study, which is concerned strictly with films that have proven definitive to what became the science fiction genre.

In 1923 Grau collaborated with Lang and von Harbou as the set designer of their two-part fantasy *Die Nibelungen* (The Nibelungs, 1924). Just before she composed *Metropolis*, von Harbou based novel and screenplay for this film on the thirteenth-century Germanic poem of the same name. In her novel and screenplay von Harbou focused not on the *Götterdämmerung* but on the superhuman race that descended from

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<sup>228</sup> For Wegener's interest in trick photography, see Eisner, *The Haunted Screen* 32-34. For information on *Der Yogi*, see *ibid.* 238.

<sup>229</sup> See Treitel, *A Science for the Soul* 109.

<sup>230</sup> Elder 52.

the gods—the “children of the mist,” or *Nibelungen*. For her, the epic was “not the song of loyalty, but a tale of deceit and betrayal, murder and revenge, blame and penance in pitiless chains.”<sup>231</sup> Its premise of the dilution of provincial feudalism and magical characters into the mundane stands in direct opposition to *Metropolis*, in which, paradoxically, technology and science restore cosmopolitan commercialism and godless materialism to the psychical harmony between the head, the hands, and the heart of the city. As upcoming chapters will discuss in greater detail, the narrative structures and themes behind both *Die Nibelungen*, set in the distant past, and *Metropolis*, set in the distant future, share an identical inspiration in astrological and Gnostic themes that Grau by no means could have ignored or not realized during his work behind the camera with Lang and von Harbou.

Furthermore, Grau was particularly acquainted with Galeen, sharing his mission to utilize the visual tricks of cinema technology to portray occult phenomena in the human experience.<sup>232</sup> In 1920, Galeen’s reputation for writing and directing supernatural scenarios led Grau to commission him as the screenwriter for Murnau’s *Nosferatu*. The set designer and co-producer for this now-famous vampire horror film, Grau commissioned Galeen to adapt a storyline based loosely on Bram Stoker’s 1897 novel *Dracula*. Originally intending *Nosferatu* to be the first in a series of personally stylized occult-themed films, Grau specially founded a film studio he called Prana-Film. Grau’s ambitions, however, were cut short. Despite the worldwide success of *Nosferatu*, Prana-Film was discontinued when Stoker’s widow sued the company for copyright

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<sup>231</sup> “Voyage to Metropolis,” on *Metropolis*. DVD. Directed by Fritz Lang. 1927 (New York, NY: Kino International Corp, 2010).

<sup>232</sup> Wegener often lectured on the ability of film to reproduce and portray supernatural experiences. Of course, in his films these experiences are linked inextricably to the occult. See Eisner, *The Haunted Screen* 34-35.

infringement of husband's novel.<sup>233</sup> It is noteworthy that the trademark symbol of Grau's studio, the yin-yang of Buddhist-Hindu spirituality, was true to the name Prana. In Tantra as well as theosophical literature, Prana denotes the esoteric "life force" or "breath" that, emanating from the sun, pervades every entity in the universe (Fig. 2.6).<sup>234</sup>

However, Grau was less discreet than Lang, Galeen, and other filmmakers concerning his interests in the occult, the Orient, and Gnosticism. In his posters, illustrations, and pamphlets for the premiers of his films, the filmmaker openly acknowledged his indebtedness to the mystical and the fantastic. When, for instance, Grau wrote his promotional essay for *Nosferatu*, he entitled it with the proclamation that Prana had created for its audience "the first occult film."<sup>235</sup> But these public allusions to the occult went far deeper for Grau. Sometime after 1917, he had become the First Chairman of Carl Kellner's and Theodor Reuss's esoteric order the Hermetic Brotherhood of Light in Berlin. With his position in the order, Grau would have been aware that Kellner and Reuss had adapted much of the esoteric doctrines of the Hermetic Brotherhood of Light, founded in 1870, into their *Ordo Templi Orientis*.<sup>236</sup> But while he embraced the order's secret doctrines on Hindu Tantra, alchemy, and sex magic, in 1925 Grau dissolved his membership when, following Reuss's death in 1923, Aleister Crowley assumed leadership of the order and instituted his "Law of Thelema" on its teachings.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Kaes 88.

<sup>234</sup> This handicap notwithstanding, Grau ventured to write and design another occult film, Arthur Robison's *Schatten: eine nächtliche Halluzination* (1923). In *Schatten*, a shadow-player performs scenarios before a dinner party hosted by a wealthy baron; but during the performance the shadow-player hypnotizes his spectators with a macabre vision of the evening's possible outcome. In addition, this film contains various visuals with occult and Gnostic symbolism that are certainly worth further investigation. For reference to Prana, see Elder 52.

<sup>235</sup> See *Nosferatu* documentary, "The Language of Shadows."

<sup>236</sup> Urban 78-79, 96. Elder 52.

<sup>237</sup> While personally acquainted with the British occultist and magician, Grau rejected this imposition because, as he put it, of the time of Atlantis. During to that time, according to Theosophists and Anthroposophists, a tyrannical race ruled the earth. For a discussion of this transition, as well as Grau's strong opposition to Crowley's leadership, see Stephen E. Flowers, *Fraternitas Saturni: The Brotherhood of Saturn; An Introduction to its History, Philosophy, and*

Grau's convictions marked a transition in his involvement with the occult and film. Between May 1926 and Easter Sunday 1928, Grau and a collection of other disillusioned German occultists from the Hermetic Brotherhood, the O.T.O., and a certain Pansophical Lodge, consolidated and refined the teachings of a new secret society, Fraternitas Saturni (The Brotherhood of Saturn).<sup>238</sup> Headquartered in Berlin, the order was conveniently close to Grau's current employer, UFA Studios. However, Grau's intensive activity in Fraternitas Saturn overtook his involvement in the film industry as the order vigorously revisited its peculiar incorporation of Hindu Tantra and yoga as well as Western astrology, alchemy, and, most significantly, Gnostic-Christian teachings.<sup>239</sup> Assuming the pseudonym Master Pacitus, he began producing esoteric literature and artwork for the society, most which were reserved for lodge members. In addition, he contributed to publicity of the Fraternitas Saturni in five issues of the society's journal, *Saturn-Gnosis*.<sup>240</sup> Enlivened by a distinct expressionism presaged in his promotional artwork for films like *Nosferatu*, the airy textures and geometric order in Grau's illustrations for the journal evoke the patterns of Hindu mandalas and the symbols of Egyptian religion (Fig. 2.7).

Less involved with cinema but nonetheless representative of the resonance of the Gnostic revival through the Weimar era is Werner Graul. An artist for UFA Studios at the age of twenty-one, Graul's single greatest contribution to cinema came in 1926 when he painted what became the most famous movie poster for *Metropolis*, depicting a

<sup>238</sup> *Rituals* Third Edition (Smithville, TX: Runa-Raven Press, 2006): 10-11. See also "The Language of Shadows," *Nosferatu* DVD.

<sup>239</sup> Flowers 12.

<sup>240</sup> For a discussion of Gnosticism, astrology, and alchemy in the Fraternitas Saturni, see esp. "Chapter 2: Doctrines of the Fraternitas Saturni" in Flowers, 17-38. Along with the basic teachings of the O.T.O. and the Anthroposophical Society, these concepts, as they pertain to the occult subtexts of Weimar film plots, will be discussed in greater detail in the upcoming two chapters.

<sup>240</sup> Flowers 12.

subdued Maria wearing a metal helmet in a translucent capsule (Fig. 2.8).<sup>241</sup> The technological trappings in the poster belie the spiritual implications behind Graul's artwork. Into the years of the Third Reich, the young Graul's artwork would become pronouncedly *völkisch*, and, as a result, increasingly anti-Semitic.<sup>242</sup> Yet his affinity toward ancient German paganism did not diminish an apparent interest in ancient technologies. In 1936 he produced a series of evocative drawings for a pamphlet entitled *Moses Entlarvt: die Wunder Mosis als lufelektrische Vorgänge* (Moses Debunked: The Miracles of Moses as Atmospheric Electrical Events). Written by a Konradin Aller, this work posited that all the alleged miracles produced by and associated with Moses, the founder of Judaism, were merely the effects of the laws of nature, which the ancient patriarch learned to exploit in his secret teachings as a high priest in Egypt.<sup>243</sup>

In particular, Aller and Graul maintained that the Ark of the Covenant was a repository of electricity, which, devised according to the precise dimensions described in *Exodus*, enabled Moses to manipulate atmospheric (static) electricity in order to deceive the Jews about his purported status as a prophet of God (see Fig. 2.9). They alluded to the work of Estonian engineer and inventor Hermann Plauson, who during his directorship of the Fischer-Tropps Otto Traun Research Laboratories in Hamburg in 1920 had boldly equated the Ark of the Covenant with an electrical capacitor. Himself inspired by Nikola Tesla's theories about the conversion of static energy for industrial application, Plauson sought to prove his claim by constructing a free energy converter

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<sup>241</sup> This image, seen on the cover of *UFA Magazine*, is featured in "Voyage to Metropolis," *Metropolis* DVD.

<sup>242</sup> See Graul's artwork and Pro-German arguments in his *Golgatha des Nordens* (Erfurt: Theil & Böhm, 1937), in which he depicts the allegedly negative social, cultural, and spiritual impacts that Christianity have had on northern Europe since its coerced conversion of the Germanic natives through mass baptism, through the Reformation, and during the conflict between Catholics and Protestants. Not surprisingly, Graul contrasted this with the peaceful and harmonious religion and lifestyle of the German paganism.

<sup>243</sup> Konradin Aller, *Moses Entlarvt: die Wunder Mosis als lufelektrische Vorgänge* (Wustrow: Rotadruck Verlag GmbH, 1936): 7-9.

that would generate and condense high-voltage electricity present in natural phenomena such as mass thunderstorms and the aurora borealis.<sup>244</sup> While the outcome of Plauson's experiments proved unfavorable, Aller and Graul did not shy away from promoting Tesla's vision of ancient technology. By conflating the lines of science and technology with spirituality and occultism in his drawings and writings, Graul began his artistic career surrounded by a slightly older circle of filmmakers and writers intrigued with the relevance of the ancient on man's spiritual hunger in the present.

Because of their fascination with the ancient Orient, the occult, and Gnosticism, Wegener, Graul, and Grau, despite their differences in age and convictions about spirituality, fit in quite nicely in the aesthetic collaboration behind, among other types of cinematic fantasy, the science fictions *Metropolis* and *Alraune*. Throughout their careers as filmmakers, Galeen, Lang, and von Harbou frequently employed such phenomena as telekinesis, hypnotism and trance, and clairvoyance as plot artifices in their cinematic attractions, novels, and other publications before and during the Weimar Republic. And yet, these themes pertaining to the modern occult movement were already present in the literary works of Hanns Heinz Ewers, Gustav Meyrink, Alfred Kubin, and Karl Hans Strobl a slightly older group of German pulp fiction writers who furnished their narratives with elements of the bizarre, the grotesque, and the fantastic. In order to evoke

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<sup>244</sup> Plauson apparently took Tesla's theory as seriously as Aller and Graul. Nor was Tesla jesting when he wrote in his article: "The superstitious belief of the ancients, if it existed at all, can therefore not be taken as a reliable proof of their ignorance, but just how much they knew about electricity can only be conjectured. A curious fact is that the ray or torpedo fish, was used by them in electro-therapy. Some old coins show twin stars, or sparks, such as might be produced by a galvanic battery. The records, though scanty, are of a nature to fill us with conviction that a few initiated, at least, had a deeper knowledge of amber - phenomena. To mention one, Moses was undoubtedly a practical and skillful electrician far in advance of his time. The Bible describes precisely and minutely arrangements constituting a machine in which electricity was generated by friction of air against silk curtains and stored in a box constructed like a condenser. It is very plausible to assume that the sons of Aaron were killed by a high tension discharge and that the vestal fires of the Romans were electrical." See Nikola Tesla, "The Wonder World to be Created by Electricity," in *Manufacturers' Record* 20 (9 Sept. 1915): 37.

these identical characteristics in their own works, the filmmakers in question exhibited the same themes, motifs, and images in their science fiction.

While common touchstone for these creators of the fantastic was obviously the repertoire of Gnostic brotherhoods and mystical societies so prevalent in German-speaking Europe before and after the war, a particular influence on filmmakers remained the visual arts. Since a picture is worth the proverbial thousand words, this study could comprise virtually endless postulations connecting visuals in *Algol*, *Wunder der Schöpfung*, *Metropolis*, *Alraune*, and *Frau im Mond* to certain ‘occult images’ published in German literature and art during the early twentieth century. The task seems inexhaustible and nigh impossible. However, visual analyses have demonstrated that the German Romanticist painter Casper David Friedrich as well as lesser *fin-de-siècle* artists like August Böcklin and Hans Thoma had inspired the mystical overtones frequently evoked by Galeen, Lang, and other directors of German Expressionist cinema.<sup>245</sup> Most notably, Lang has been known to produce visual tricks almost subliminally in his *mis en scènes* on numerous occasions, affirming the director’s penchant to meticulous order and expressionistic stylization.<sup>246</sup> For this reason, it is not improbable that Galeen, Lang, and other directors pulled from more contemporary sources on the occult in order to wield his actors, light patterns, and geometrical compositions into aesthetic gestalts.

Even screenwriters like Thea von Harbou wrote their novels and screenplays in an expressionist style reminiscent of *fin-de-siècle* artwork. Drenched in a unique purple prose, nearly all the von Harbou’s publications are littered with references and allusions

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<sup>245</sup> Eisner, *Fritz Lang* (London: Da Capo Press, 1976/1986): 46, *The Haunted Screen* 9; Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After* 25. See also “The Language of Shadows,” in *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* (orig. *Nosferatu: Eine Symphonie des Grauens*). DVD. Directed by F.W. Murnau. 1920 (Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2000).

<sup>246</sup> See Tom Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity* (London: British Film Institute, 2000): 45-46.

to classical culture and mythologies as her characters struggle to make their experiences communicable, even intelligible, to themselves and others. Her novel version of *Frau im Mond*, for example, heaves with literary allusions to gods and goddesses.<sup>247</sup> By far her most colorful appropriation of ancient myths and religion includes her novel and screenplay for *Metropolis*. In both their plots, machines become anthropomorphized into man-devouring animals and workplaces into religious sites. Falling upon the machine halls in the book, the hero Freder sees, instead of machinery, deities of ancient times including Baal of the Canaanites and Huitzilopochtli of the Aztecs, while futuristic workspaces turn into “the Juggernaut’s divine car and the Towers of Silence, Mahomet’s curved sword, and the crosses of Golgotha.”<sup>248</sup> Similar anthropomorphisms and metamorphoses occur in the expressionistic visuals in von Harbou’s screenplay for *Dr. Mabuse*—illustrating that the graven image modern man has made unto himself is the machine, and that he in turn has sacrificed himself to it.

To be sure, the ancient Orient was a central inspiration to the screenplays of *Algol* and *Metropolis*, given the references to Eastern cultures throughout their plots. The novels and screenplays of Thea von Harbou were often imbued with references to Eastern mysticism. Including *Das indische Grabmal* (The Indian Tomb, 1920), *Der müde Tod* (The Weary Death, 1921), and *Dr. Mabuse: Der Spieler* (Dr. Mabuse: the Gambler, 1922), almost all of her films with Lang involved shamans, magic, yoga, the martial arts, and other direct references to Hinduism and Buddhism in either a modern or ancient setting. Even films that Lang wrote and directed before his work with von Harbou, most

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<sup>247</sup> See e.g. Thea von Harbou, *Frau im Mond* (ed. Rainer Eisfeld. München: Wilhelm Heyne Verlag GmbH, 1928/1989): 155-163.

<sup>248</sup> See e.g. Thea von Harbou, *Metropolis* (Berlin: August Scherl Verlag GmbH, 1927): 33-35.

notably *Die Spinnen* (The Spiders, 1919), centered their plots on a thematic mixture of Eastern mysticism and technology.<sup>249</sup>

Yet in an autobiographical statement, Lang plainly stated: “My private life has nothing to do with my films.”<sup>250</sup> Still, in his lifetime Lang was notorious for his reluctance to disclose much about his professional or personal life. Above all, Lang was particularly known for his outright fabrication of purported life events in order to avoid explaining the significance behind his works or his opinion about the social issues in them.<sup>251</sup> But in spite of his secrecy, Lang must have shared with von Harbou a great interest in the ancient Orient and Eastern mysticism. Take, for example, this publicity photograph for UFA Studios, circa 1925 (Fig. 2.10). The oblong divan, the Persian rug, and the swastikas in the metalwork of the table and rug betray Lang’s oft-refuted claim. A sign of the couple’s lifelong taste for the exotic and mystical that followed them throughout their careers in cinema, the décor in this photo also belies the fact that they are reviewing the script for *Metropolis*, a film that seemingly has nothing to do with ancient mysticism and Gnosticism.

But, as Chapter Three, Four, and Five will demonstrate, this assumption is a shallow observation of a plot containing an occult subtext that is about more than a technocratic city of the future. The same is likewise true for the plots of *Algol* and *Frau im Mond*, whose stories contain more than meets the eye. While there remains much research must be conducted to verify the extent to which these and other filmmakers were involved in

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<sup>249</sup> Fritz Lang. *Fritz Lang’s The Spiders* (orig. *Die Spinnen*) DVD. Directed by Fritz Lang. 1919, 1920 (New York, NY: Kino Classics, 2012).

<sup>250</sup> Numerous scholars and critics have received Lang’s statement with skepticism. McGilligan opens his biography on Lang with a rapid-fire refutation of this claim (5-9). For the quotation in the larger context of Lang’s autobiographical essay, see Eisner, *Fritz Lang* 15.

<sup>251</sup> Lang’s lack of credibility has led scholars to receive the director’s comments about his cinema and his personal life with considerable caution. See Gunning 8-10.

the ancient Orient, the occult, and Gnosticism, there is sufficient proof that—both in their personal and private lives—the would-be creators of Weimar fantasy cinema consciously employed these themes into science fiction.<sup>252</sup> This is because the occult and Gnosticism had recently been revived in the public interest and affected the public conception of science during the *fin de siècle*. As a result, it also influenced the early writers of German-speaking fantasy literature, which often bordered on themes known later as science fiction. And, most of all, it is significant that the scientists and scholars, the authors and artists, in the *fin-de-siècle* cultural milieu found a *personal* quality about their vocation with regard to the occult and Gnosticism.

#### LIMITLESSNESS OF REALITY

In Weimar science fiction, perhaps the most explicit portrayal of modern scientific man's obsession with the ancient was dramatized by Thea von Harbou in her 1928 novel *Frau im Mond*. Serialized in *Berliner Illustrierte* magazine a year before its cinematic adaptation, its theatrical release was anticipated to be a true science fiction film—one that combined a fantastic plot with authentic scientific speculation about a spaceship to the moon. As one promotional article put it:

An ancient dream of humanity: the desire for the Moon—that bright companion of the Earth, that mysterious, distant, and yet familiar star whose cold, pale luster exerts a magical effect. Also succumbing to the magic of the moon is the old, impoverished, and reclusive astronomer Professor Manfeldt. With pure science he

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<sup>252</sup> As the example of Paul Wegener indicates, the actors in these films were likely aware of the occult overtones as well. While Wegener seems to have been an exception in his personal engagement with the occult, the ancient Orient, and Gnosticism, directors of the science fiction/fantasy genre in Weimar Germany often casted the same repertoire of actors in their films. For example, Werckmeister used John Gottowt as the repulsive alien in *Algol*, but Grau also casted the actor as the occult-savvy Paracelsian Professor Bulwer in Grau's *Nosferatu*, and later as the mysterious hypnotist and shadowplayer in his *Schatten*—two other figures that represent the keepers of occult knowledge. Other recurring actors include Georg John (*Die Spinnen*, *The Indian Tomb*, *The Weary Death*, *Dr. Mabuse*, *Die Nibelungen*, *Metropolis*, *Alraune*), Rudolf Klein-Rogge (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *The Weary Death*, *Schatten*, *Die Nibelungen*, *Metropolis*), Hanna Ralph (*Algol*, *Die Nibelungen*, *Faust*), and Hans Adalbert Schlettow (*Algol*, *Dr. Mabuse*, *Die Nibelungen*). Further investigation must determine whether these patterns have any relevance to the actors' personal engagement with the arcane or are simply the arbitrary result of typecasting.

has shown that the moon is accessible by means of modern technology and that gold should be present there.<sup>253</sup>

As the article suggests, von Harbou had carefully balanced fact with fiction in devising an ultramodern drama that turned true man's most primal longing and made tangible his greatest fascinations. In depicting the moon flight, she consulted the hypothetical astrophysics outlined in *Mit Raketenkraft ins Weltall* (Into Outer Space by Rocket Power, 1928) by Otto Willi Gail, *Die Möglichkeit der Weltraumfahrt* (The Possibility of Space Travel, 1928) by Willy Ley, and *Die Rakete zu den Planetenräumen* (Rockets into Interplanetary Space, 1929) by Hermann Oberth.<sup>254</sup> Condensing their research into her novel and her screenplay, von Harbou created the story about Prof. Manfeldt, a genius mocked for his revolutionary theories for three decades, who, despite years of derision, *has* in fact arrived on the moon with a crew of young astronomers.

In the novel, what Manfeldt finds on the moon is far more fantastic than the interplanetary trip made possible by modern science. Rather than merely finding the precious "metal of the gods," he makes an even greater discovery that calls into question the preeminence of human science and modern civilization: remnants of the gods themselves. Guided by a dowsing rod he brought in the spaceship, Manfeldt is led to the towering ruins of a great colony that, so professor presumes, must have been inhabited by titans. Shadowed amongst the crumbling walls that appear to him as gigantic monuments of the gods, the professor becomes aware that he, "though a speck of dust, carries in himself the miracle of life, of his own unconquered being." Then, as the ruins themselves

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<sup>253</sup> German original: „Ein uralter Traum der Menschheit: Die Sehnsucht nach dem Monde, dem leuchtenden Begleiter der Erde, dem geheimnisvoll fernen und doch so vertrauten Gestirn, dessen kalter fahler Glanz eine magische Wirkung ausübt. –Auch der alte, verarmte und menschenscheue Astronom Professor Manfeldt ist der Magie des Mondes erlegen. Streng wissenschaftlich hat er nachgewiesen, daß mit den Mitteln der modernen Technik der Mond erreichbar sei und daß Gold auf ihm vorhanden sein müsse.“ Anonymous, „Frau im Mond: Ein Film von Fritz Lang/Manuskript: Thea v. Harbou,“ *Illustrierter Film-Kurier* 11 (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Weiner GmbH, 1929): 3.

<sup>254</sup> See the dedication page to von Harbou's novel.

take on the likeness of gods, Manfeldt exclaims in wonder:

Gods! Gods!! How shall I call upon you? What shall I call you? –See, your names have disintegrated and become forgotten! Your kings and your people, see, they are now but mist, a cloud on the morning sky of the moon! I, the man, the heir, am here! –Open the doors of your palaces to me! Sesame of the moon, open yourself for me! –The dowsing rod! I have the dowsing rod! Where did the gods of the moon hide their treasure as the twilight of their glorious civilization broke forth?<sup>255</sup>

Eventually, Manfeldt finds the gold whose magnetic force had attracted his dowsing rod. Crawling up the steps of what he deduces was a great temple, the scientist concludes that the by-gone colony must have been built by a by-gone race of superhuman titans.

The richness of von Harbou's description is worth quoting at length:

Yes, this surely was a cathedral... a great cathedral, erected by servitor gods for greater gods. Rocks were piled on rocks to form the walls, peaks of cliffs were transformed into pillars, blocks of stone joined other blocks until steps were made. And the servitor gods had sought in the shafts of the cliffs the most precious materials held by the depth of the mountains of the moon, and with their eyes uplifted to the great gods on high, they had carved their images with prayer, half out of red gold and half out of glistening crystal.

But they dared not carve the image of the greatest, the holiest god. They took the gold and made a great cube, so large that a hundred giants could stand upon it. And they took rock crystal and formed from it an orb, so large that a hundred giants could not lift it to throw. The purest of pure, resting on the purest of the pure, was the image of the Highest God.<sup>256</sup>

Overcome by the ancient space, which shimmers in silence, Manfeldt falls to his feet and,

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<sup>255</sup> Original: „Götter! –Götter!! –Wie rufe ich euch? –Wie soll ich euch nennen? –Seht, eure Namen sind verstäubt und verschollen! Ihr Könige und ihr Völker, seht, ihr seid Dunst, eine Wolke am Morgenhimme des Mondes! Ich, der Mensch, der Erbe, bin da! –Tut mir die Torre eurer Paläste auf! –Sesam des Mondes, öffne dich vor mir! –Wünschelrute! –Wünschelrute! –Wohin haben die Götter des Mondes ihre Schätze verwünscht, als die Götterdämmerung für sie hereinbrach?“ Thea von Harbou, *Frau im Mond*, ed. Rainer Eisfeld (München: Wilhelm Heyne Verlag GmbH, 1928/1989): 160.

<sup>256</sup> Original: „Ja, dies war wohl ein Dom... dies war wohl ein großer Dom, von dienenden Göttern für größere Götter errichtet. Felsen hatten die über Felsen zu Mauern getürmt, Felsnadeln zu ragenden Säulen gebündelt, Blöcke mit Blöcken geblendet und Stufen gebaut. Und die dienenden Götter hatten die Felsenschächten das Reinsten geschöpft, das die Gebirge des Mondes bargen, und hatten die Augen zu den größeren Göttern erhoben und die Bilder der größeren Götter anbetend geschaffen, zur Hälfte aus dem roten Gold, zur Hälfte aus dem weißem Kristall. /Aber das Bildnis des höchsten, des heiligsten Gottes wagten sie nicht zu schaffen. Sie nahmen das Gold und formten daraus einen Würfel, so groß, daß hundert Riesen darauf zu stehen vermochten – und nahmen Bergkristall und schliffen daraus eine Kugel, so groß, daß hundert Riesen sie nicht zu tragen vermochten. Dies Reinsten ruhend, war Sinnbild des höchsten Gottes“ (von Harbou, *Frau im Mond* 161).

transfixed on the idol before him, whispers in reverent awe: “Gold!”<sup>257</sup>

But this scene appeared nowhere in Lang’s film. In spite of the centrality to the plot of von Harbou’s novel, the evocative imagery of the forgotten colony, the great temple, and the shrine with its crystal orb and golden cube are not even mentioned in her final screenplay. Instead of a great hall of the titans, Prof. Manfeldt (Klaus Pohl) stumbles upon a cave lined with rock formations containing traces of gold. Instead of prostrating himself before an idol, the enamored scientist dislodges a statuesque stalagmite, and then, fondling it in the darkness, falls to his death in a precipice. In contrast, von Harbou’s novel gives a lengthy account of how the rest of the members of the crew eventually discover the professor, and how, after his persistent refusal to depart from the holy place and return to his home planet, Manfeldt remains motionless, his arms outstretched, his head upturned toward the idol before him.<sup>258</sup> This is no minor change to the plot.

The reason that Lang changed this scene—as well as others in von Harbou’s original screenplay for *Frau im Mond*—was practical: his reluctance to shoot sound sequences. Originally, in 1928 UFA Studios had proposed to shoot intermittent sequences of Lang’s film in sound, leaving the majority of the scenes in the standard silent format. By adopting this technique, UFA hoped to compete with more prestigious American film corporations such as Warner Brothers, which had began utilizing this approach to sound in 1927 with its internationally acclaimed *The Jazz Singer*. Writing her novel in 1928, von Harbou had obviously anticipated the film to be shot in sound, as many plot twists rely on impersonations, ventriloquism, and other verbal deceptions between the

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<sup>257</sup> Manfeldt is not imagining this wondrous scene. Soon, the other members of the crew, forming a search party for the scientist, discover him before in the temple of gold and crystal, and document the entire area in their log. See von Harbou, *Frau im Mond* 174-181.

<sup>258</sup> Von Harbou, *Frau im Mond* 195.

characters.<sup>259</sup> Despite his wife's plans, however, Lang argued that spliced sequences of sound and silence would break the filmic continuity and thus deflate audience anticipation. With his unbending all-or-nothing principle, for Lang the choice between sound and silence was as stark as the difference between black and white.<sup>260</sup> By 1929, the film version of *Frau im Mond* would premier entirely without sound.

Had Lang remained faithful to the outcome of von Harbou's novel, an entirely different dialogue between the supernatural and the scientific would have flickered onto celluloid. In its actualized form, far from taking poetic license with von Harbou's original story, Lang's film utterly changes the fate of Prof. Manfeldt in such a way that it alters the audience's perception of him. Though Manfeldt is still an eccentric scientist whose fantastic theories about space travel and moon gold become realized in the course of the drama, his delusions of grandeur culminate in a pathetic and anticlimactic death. This fate contrasts with that of the novel, where Manfeldt's reaction becomes subdued by his discovery of a still more fantastic reality—the colossal ruins of a colony, which had, much like Manfeldt himself, voyaged to the moon in search of gold deposits.<sup>261</sup> By accomplishing the greatest feat in astrophysics known to man, Manfeldt has uncovered a sobering reminder about the futility of the human race and the fleetingness of corporeal

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<sup>259</sup> In von Harbou's novel, there are many scenes in which the antagonist, Walt Turner, uses his talents as a ventriloquist and impersonator to subvert the mission to the moon and take over the spaceship. Because these scenes spur some of the chief plot artifices in her novel, it is obvious von Harbou originally intended to translate these dialogue sequences onto the screen. Moreover, in her novel von Harbou set up question-and-answer sequences in which her characters ask the scientists about the astrophysics involved in moon flight. Given that von Harbou faithfully transcribed scientific theories into her novel, she probably anticipated reiterating this dialogue in her screenplay. While Lang still conveyed a great deal of scientific knowledge in the form of intertitles and visual representations in the final version of the film, von Harbou's screenplay suffered greatly in this respect from the lack of sound.

<sup>260</sup> In his interview with Peter Bogdanovich in 1976, Lang would recollect that his refusal to add any sound effects whatsoever led to a great dispute with UFA Studios (See Bogdanovich 125-126).

<sup>261</sup> Note the overwhelming similarities between the description of Manfeldt in von Harbou's novel for *Frau im Mond* and the visuals of the visionary priest during the Tower of Babel sequence in Lang's film version of *Metropolis*. In particular, note that the astronomer-priest planned to inscribe, "Great is the world and its Creator! And great is man!" into the top of the unrealized Tower of Babel, and that, in *Frau im Mond*, Manfeldt marvels at the prayer, inscribed by the ancient colonists in their temple to their own gods.

achievement. Science and technology have opened, rather than closed, riddles about cosmogony as well as anthropogony, that is, the origins and development of the human species.

This discovery would have certainly lent greater significance to the epigram in the film version of *Frau im Mond*, which states: “For the human spirit, there exists no ‘never’—at most a ‘not yet’.”<sup>262</sup> More than a meditation on man’s longing to rise above his environment and conquer unknown worlds, it would have also reminded viewers that man, in spite of his tendency to calculate, categorize, and rule, is not the center of the universe, and that, as wise King Solomon observed, there is nothing new under the sun.

If the dowsing rod in the original ending of von Harbou’s novel thus vindicates Prof. Manfeldt in the same way that the success of the mandrake experiment justifies the seemingly absurd theories of Privy Councilor ten Brinken in *Alraune*, then the filmic reality of its otherwise dubious powers recalls the other tools and methods of occult science found in the plots in Weimar science fiction cinema. Its eternal potency resembles the precision of religious and astrological predictions with regard to the scientifically viable fate of the astronomers in *Wunder der Schöpfung*. And its efficacy shares that of the mysterious machine by which Robert Herne harnesses kinetic energy from the variable star in *Algol*, as well as Rotwang’s magical technology and the accuracy of Maria’s prophecy in *Metropolis*. But more than occult phenomena alone, in these five films it is the characters’ knowledge about the recurrence of the primal past, as well as their ability, whether with intent or by accident, to replicate the events of the past through science and technology, which propels the plot from the restrictions of the

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<sup>262</sup> Original: „Es gibt für den menschlichen Geist kein Niemals, höchstens Noch nicht.“

mundane and into the boundlessness of the fantastic.

The paradox and contradiction within these plots largely reflect the milieu of scholarship and mysticism in *fin-de-siècle* German-speaking Europe. As discussed in the previous chapter, this is because the screenwriters and directors of Weimar science fiction film, as young people in German-speaking Europe between 1900 and 1917, had witnessed a cultural upheaval that demonstrated how modern science could actually uncover from antiquity shocking discoveries whose implications Westerners could have otherwise thought fantastic. Through these romanticized renderings of science and occultism, these filmmakers demonstrated how near they and their contemporaries were in the early twentieth century to a scientific world once seen by scientists themselves—apparently immemorial—as inextricably tied to the spiritual world. At times, these filmmakers drew their aesthetic connections between the ancient and the modern with an occasional sense of irony and, at other times, subtle tongue-in-cheek humor. And yet, their films' consistent thematic associations of the occult, Gnosticism, science, and technology attest to something more deliberate and pronounced than a mere timbre of the milieu of classical modernism.

Rather than being vaguely inspired by the intellectual-cultural milieu sparked during the *fin de siècle*, the Weimar-era filmmakers shared with other German-speaking authors of fantasy and proto-science fiction an astute knowledge of the ancient Orient, the occult, and Gnosticism. This counterculture inspired the directors and screenwriters of Weimar science fiction for its irony, its mystique, but also its appeal to the human experience in an ultramodern, industrialized world. Not only would these fantastic elements find

expressionistic overtones in their films and novels during the 1920s, their themes would captivate the public imagination in German-speaking Europe through similar literature during the first twenty years of the century as well. Nor did the Great War enshroud Europe with an *Entzauberung*—Weber’s alleged devaluation of mysticism—during the years of the Weimar Republic. This continued interest in heterodox spiritualities and technological breakthroughs would go on to influence the science fiction cinema of Weimar Germany, which often exhibited its creators’ knowledge of mysticism and popular arcana in a fashion more subtle and sophisticated than the proto-genre’s scientific underpinnings.



Fig. 2.1: *Wunder der Schöpfung* opens with the intertitle: “On the Path to Truth. ‘The most beautiful joy of the thinking man is to have explored the explorable and to revere silently that which cannot be explored.’ Goethe.” Rather than differentiating between philosophical truth and scientific fact, the entire film takes a monistic approach to the sum reality of the universe and man’s knowledge of the cosmos.<sup>263</sup>



Fig. 2.2: Ultramodern architecture hearkens to the observatories of Babylon and China. Whereas man was once limited to gazing on the stars, now he will land on them: “A fantasy ship of the most daring type should carry us through still insurmountable distances. [...] Transported by tremendous electrical energies, the spaceship overcomes the earth’s gravity.”<sup>264</sup>



Fig. 2.3: Though the intertitles are not explicit, a gnostic vision inspires the astronomer-priest to build the Tower of Babel in *Metropolis*. Recall the words of the ancient philosopher Schultz and mystic Mead in drawing the connections between astrology and Gnosticism in occult science.



Fig. 2.4: The vision of the astronomer-priest still hangs in the stars as, ironically, the tower is reduced to rubble. Commenting on the visual aesthetics of his film in a promotional essay, Lang wrote: “Everything I have to tell, I cannot express in words, but in depicting black and white on the celluloid of film; if I cannot succeed in finding expression on the picture, I certainly cannot find it in speech.”<sup>265</sup>

<sup>263</sup> Compare to Carl du Prel’s own appeal to this quote from Goethe: “To him who knows the least of [the universe], it appears far simpler than to the genius [...]. Goethe describes it as the finest happiness of man to have investigated whatever can be ascertained, and silently to revere what is inscrutable” (du Prel, *Philosophy of Mysticism* I, 14).

<sup>264</sup> Original: „Ein Phantasieschiff kühnster Art soll uns in zunächst noch unüberwindliche Fernen tragen. [...] Von ungeheuren elektrischen Energien getragen, [...] überwindet das Raumschiff die Anziehungskraft der Erde.“

<sup>265</sup> This essay was featured in a small pamphlet printed for the English-language premier of *Metropolis* in March 1927. Because this pamphlet was distributed only at theaters before the screening of the film, its pages disclose little about its printing information. Anonymous, ed. “Metropolis: Premier Presentation at Marble Arch Pavilion, Monday, March 21. Special Edition” (UFA/Wardour Films Limited, 1927).

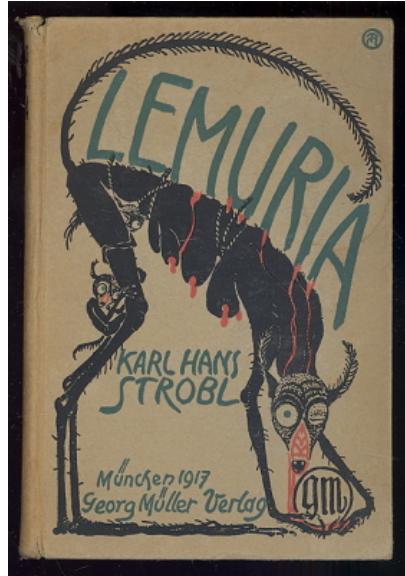


Fig. 2.5: Filled with tales of macabre, the cover image and seemingly unrelated title of Karl Hans Strobl's *Lemuria* (1917) make a mocking reference to the disease, starvation, and economic and political erosion of the German Empire as a fate not dissimilar to the decadence and subsequent decline of the primordial Lemurian civilization.



Fig. 2.6: A poster for the 1922 premier of *Nosferatu*, a film that blurs the lines between science and the occult, boasts the aesthetic collaboration of three filmmakers adept in Gnosticism: Henrik Galeen, Albin Grau, and F.W. Murnau. Note the trademark symbol used for Prana-Film in the lower right-hand corner.<sup>266</sup>

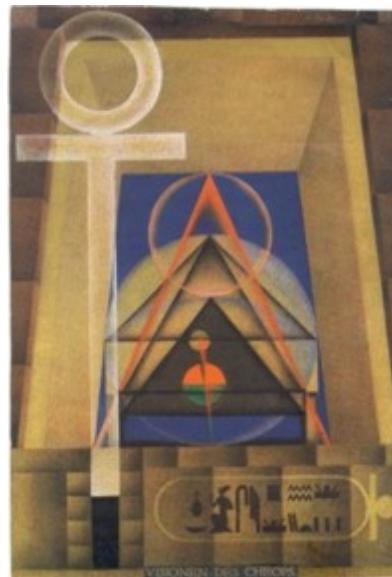


Fig. 2.7: One of the paintings Grau published for *Saturn Gnosis*, the official periodical for Fraternitas Saturni, circa 1928.<sup>267</sup>



Fig. 2.8: The best-known work of young Werner Graul is the premier poster for Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, featured here on *UFA Magazine*.<sup>268</sup>

<sup>266</sup> Grau's poster featured in the documentary on *Nosferatu*, entitled "The Language of Shadows."

<sup>267</sup> This particular image from *Saturn-Gnosis* may be found at: <http://www.fraternitas.de/hist-sgkunst.htm>.

<sup>268</sup> Photo featured in the documentary "Voyage to Metropolis," *Metropolis* DVD.



Fig. 2.9: As a corrective to Tesla's theory, Aller echoed the engineer Plauson by noting that, in order to generate adequate electricity, the size of cherubim flanking the Ark must have been "increased tremendously" from their recorded size in *Exodus*. Graul's illustration visualizes his point: "The measurement from one wingspan to the other is five meters, which touches the conductive inner lining of the choir with one of the wingspans."<sup>269</sup>



Fig. 2.10: Fritz Lang and Thea von Harbou pose for this publicity photo in the parlor of their flat in Berlin, circa 1925. By rendering their personal life for public exhibition, the lens of the camera reveals that the couple did not confine the ancient Orient and mysticism to the plots of their films alone.<sup>270</sup>

<sup>269</sup> Original: „Die beiden Cherubim waren gewaltig gewachsen. Fünf Meter maß einer von einer Flügelspalte bis zur anderen und jeder berührte leitend den Innenbelag des Chores mit einer Flügelspalte“ (Aller 39).

<sup>270</sup> Photo featured in the documentary "Voyage to Metropolis," *Metropolis* DVD.

CHAPTER THREE  
REVELATIONS OF KNOWLEDGE

Robert Herne has led an embittered life. The foreman of a coalmine, he sees no future for himself other than the meager standards his social status has allotted him. Despite the unwavering affection of his fellow worker and friend, Maria Obal (Hannah Ralph), Robert remains pessimistic when the new empress of their country, Leonore Nissen (Gertrud Welcker), requests him to divulge the needs and desires of the working class, whose suffering he witnesses and shares each day in the mines, so that she might alleviate their plight. Feeling insulted by the benevolent empress, the narrow-minded Robert returns to his tenement house, which he shares with Maria. Also residing at their tenement house is Algol, a swarthy, diminutive man who appeared to Robert in the mines just after his first acquaintance with Empress Nissen. Claiming to be Robert's newly appointed assistant, Algol has just taken residence with Robert and Maria. With a giant tome he reads at the dinner table, this wide-eyed, grimacing figure becomes a break from the banality and degradation for Robert, who gradually forgets his troubles and responsibilities in his growing preoccupation with the suspicious lodger.

Late at night, as Maria confides in Robert that she fears for their relationship, Algol suddenly appears at the doorway of the house and demands: "Give me light, Robert. I must go to my books." In spite of his apprehension about the condition of his life and the workers of his country, the foreman leaves the distraught Maria as he creeps up the stairs after Algol.

Entering a dimly lit chamber, Robert finds Algol at a desk huddled over a pile of dusty books. Then, snatching a manuscript from the little man's hands, Robert reads aloud the lines of an arcane poem:

A thousand paths lead to the Light.  
 Seek but one and fear ye not.  
 Algol will lead thee from misery and night.  
 Will it, and thine is the Power of the Earth.<sup>271</sup>

Far from startled by the intrusion, the forlorn Algol swiftly presents his intruder with a map of the galaxy, which, adorned with a hieroglyphic script and a hexagram, indicates the position of the planet Algol in relation to the planet Earth. Robert's intellect is visibly stimulated as he pours over the mysterious map and its symbols, and Algol presents him with a bifurcated pole with eight upward-reaching prongs. Robert clasps the object as Algol pulls from beneath the desk a still more fantastic device that simultaneously fascinates and horrifies Robert: a machine. A complex mechanism of interlocking wheels and pulleys, the machine sits motionless. Pulling him away, Algol gestures upward and he lures Robert, who still holds the bifurcated pole, to the balcony. Aligning the pole with an especially bright star in the night sky, the small man turns to Robert and, raising left arm, exclaims, "Algol will lead thee from misery and night!" as suddenly sparks explode from the prongs of the pole.

But this seemingly magical pole is actually an antenna. As the smoke dies around them, Algol motions to Robert to look inside the room behind him, where he finds the machine in full motion as it emits a pulsing spark in the dim chamber. Realizing that the antenna has channeled the beams of Algol to activate the machine, no sooner is Robert drawn to its illuminated device than he is repulsed by it, quivering with foreshortened arm. He jolts when Algol leaps between him and the machine, proposing: "Just one year and you will have command over the world!"

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<sup>271</sup> Original: „Tausend Wege führen zum Licht. /Suche einen und fürchte Dich nicht. /Algol führt Dich aus Not und Nacht. /Wolle, und Dein ist die Erdenmacht.“

Before Robert can respond, Algol retrieves the manuscript next to the machine, and, pulling the frightened coal miner closer to him, reveals the origins of this strange technology. He turns to the dedication page: “To my assistants in my dying hour –Dr. Crane.”<sup>272</sup> Algol immediately turns to a page headlined with an inverted pentagram, pointing to an excerpt that reads: “[...] from the variable star Algol down to the Earth. Nobody is aware of them, and nobody knew before me about these waves. Here in my small machine I launched them for the first time. Whoever enhances their magnitude will have the eternal power (*ewige Kraft*), which the world [...].”<sup>273</sup> As if to emphasize the late scientist’s line about amplification of the star’s rays, Algol hands Robert and spyglass at a window in the room and urges the miner to probe the heavens with the lens. Robert convulses when, gazing through the glass, he notices the rays of Algol beaming through what had previously appeared to his limited perception to be pitch-black sky.

Just as Robert’s traumatic discovery marks a decisive twist in the narrative of Werckmeister’s *Algol*, the critical turning points in the dramas by Galeen, Kornblum, and Lang also come when the mystical power of science and technology reveals itself to the protagonist, who, upon his unsettling discovery, can only resolve his existential alienation by learning to grasp, manipulate, or subdue the arcane forces with the knowledge behind its inner workings. In most cases, such as Robert’s, this alienation is caused in the first place by science and technology—the drudgery of the industrial city, the cruelty of factory engines—but this inner awakening to previously undetected phenomena need not arise from trauma incurred by abject ignorance of the extrasensory factors lurking

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<sup>272</sup> Original: „Meinem Gehilfen in meiner Sterbestunde /Doktor Crane.“

<sup>273</sup> Unfortunately, the version of the film accessed for this work was preserved at a very low quality, and only this excerpt could be read. Further research must go into finding a more legible version of the film. Original: „[...] vom Algolstern herab auf die Erde. /Niemand kennt sie, niemand wüßte vor mir von diesen Wellen. Hier in meiner kleinen Maschine fing ich sie zum ersten Mal ein. Wer sie vergroßert, der hat die ewige Kraft, die die Welt [...].“

beneath banal existence. Nor must the mystical power behind science and technology be antithetical or somehow adverse to the protagonist's willpower. Far from it, since in the process of mastery the protagonist finds himself and his true identity in his reconciliation with these phantasmal forces. But in all cases, the visionary is left distressed by a shattering revelation that negates everything he had previously assumed about the order of the universe.

Robert's identity crisis is thoroughly horrifying. As soon as he strikes a deal with his mysterious lodger, the lowly miner will never be the same. Distraught and overcome by his revelation, he wrenches his breast as the mirror on the wall behind Algol suddenly glows with the mysterious lines he had read from the poem. Robert shrinks into a corner as Algol raises both arms and suddenly transforms into a fiend with erratic hair, shaded eye sockets, and a black gown, shouting: "I gave you the force! – Twelve moons are the time you have to enhance it!"<sup>274</sup> The grotesque being that calls himself Algol vanishes in a cloud of smoke, as the panicking Robert Herne, left alone with the machine, collapses unconscious on the floor. A shattered perspective, sudden alienation, the sensation of having fallen from a great height—the case is the same for the protagonists in *Wunder der Schöpfung*, *Metropolis*, *Alraune*, and *Frau im Mond*.

While crises that erupt in these highly bizarre plots reflect Germany's broken identity as a nation during the 1920s, the inspiration for their narratives, themes, and symbols also derives in no small part from the modern occult movement and the *fin-de-siècle* revival of Gnosticism. By making oblique references to scholarly research on ancient Gnosticism and the occult as well as prevalent esoteric teachings shared by Rosicrucianism, Ordo

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<sup>274</sup> Original: „Ich gab Sie die Kraft! – Zwölf Monde hast Du Zeit!“

Templi Orientis, Anthroposophy, and Fraternitas Saturni throughout their works within the proto-genre of science fiction, German filmmakers utilized touchstone knowledge behind secret societies and scholarly treatises in order to elicit feelings of both the marvelous and the uncanny, helping form audience expectations in the cinematic experience of the fantasy genre. Significantly, for filmmakers and mystics alike, these narrative patterns were neither inherently modern nor ancient; rather, they worked as a heuristic tool for unraveling the deepest riddles of the human experience.

#### QUESTIONS OF IDENTITY

If the creators of this proto-genre centered their plots on the recurrence of the primal past, then they did so to demonstrate that the very knowledge of this past causes a crisis of identity for their protagonists, the knowledge of which comes as a shocking, and often violent, revelation. In all instances, this crisis occurs because the protagonist realizes that his knowledge of the past is not simply about the past—it calls into question the essence of who he always has been *and* remains to be. Through their peculiar genre these filmmakers suggested that the true workings of nature are neither as harmonious nor as orderly as prewar society had assumed, revealing that an explosive subjectivity and radical alienation underlies the alleged impartiality of science and technology. While at first these filmic revelations seem to emanate from an intellectual insight based on practical, exoteric knowledge, closer examine reveals that the personal transformations these characters undergo are allegorical descriptions of a profoundly intuited, esoteric form of knowledge whose logic transcends causal thinking and adequate expression.

Influenced by popular occult teachings already propagated by esoteric schools in early twentieth-century Germany, the filmmakers behind these science fictions intended their

melodramatic epiphanies to symbolize—both linguistically and visually—spiritual awakenings of the individual that, while indeed conducive to scientific breakthroughs and technological progress, bespoke a more profound interior transformation. Echoed in the teachings of Rosicrucianism, Anthroposophy, the O.T.O., and F.S., these awakenings bear uncanny resemblance to the Gnostic-Christian account of *anamnesis* (Greek: “to make present via recollection”),<sup>275</sup> or spiritual awakening, which in arcane doctrine provokes the initial salvific vision of the neophyte in his quest for spiritual illumination. In each film, likewise, moments of ‘*anamnesis*’ signify the chief turning points in the drama which gradually lead the hero and/or heroine to resolve a problem of which they were hitherto either vaguely aware or altogether ignorant. Just as in Gnosticism *anamnesis* marked a stage in the personal development and liberation of the initiate, so also are the characters in these moments challenged to go a step further in unraveling the ontological mystery of the universe and themselves.

#### *Withdrawing from the World*

Because each protagonist’s revelation about his identity brings to him a piece of primal wisdom transcendent of time and space, this message belongs to the realm of pure myth. In addition to their mythic quality, the crises portrayed in these films are equally apocalyptic. In all their carnage and psychical torment, the works of Galeen, Kornblum, Lang, and Werckmeister are the filmic heirs to the hellish destruction of urban sprawl found on the near-prophetic canvases of prewar painter Ernst Ludwig Meidner and other

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<sup>275</sup> Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Antoine Faivre, et. al., ed. *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esoterism* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006): 795. This term was not unique to Gnostic sects of Christianity, and its use still exists in many confessions today. In Roman Catholicism, for example, the prayer of remembrance which calls to mind Jesus’s passion, resurrection, and ascension into heaven marks the high point of the Mass as a memorial of what occurred during Christ’s visible stay on earth as a pledge of what he continues to do invisibly through the Eucharist. The transubstantiation, then, is the enactment of *anamnesis*.

German Expressionist artists. But apocalyptic imagery was nothing new to the twentieth century; it formed the basis for ancient Gnostic literature, whose own mythologies, resurfacing contemporaneous to the Expressionist vanguard, found new impetus in the first decade of the twentieth century. Filled with doom and despair, the tumultuous lexicon of the Gnostic myths contained within itself a treasury of allegories about man's internal struggle to discover his true self and the hidden meaning of the cosmos. Echoing their fables and metaphors in the appeal to light and darkness, consciousness and unconsciousness, the creators of Weimar science fiction drew strong aesthetic links between the traumatic revelations of their characters and the eschatological overtones in Gnostic texts.

In Werckmeister's *Algol*, Robert Herne's *anamnesis* comes when he is presented with the mysterious machine by the alien figure that calls himself Algol. Having accepted the machine and the challenge to comprehend the power of its rays (the "eternal force"), Robert must emerge from his trauma and reconcile himself with his private vision. It is the machine, not Algol, which has elicited fear in the despairing miner (Fig. 3.1). Yet this machine, while of a purely mechanical type, has come into the room, as Robert soon learns, by means of, and is powered by, a supernatural entity: Algol—viz., the alien being and the variable star, respectively. With all the semblance of a Faustian bargain, this collision of contradictions consummates an entire identity transformation for the miner as he withdraws from society, even cutting his contacts with Maria, to contemplate the machinery of the Algol machine.

Within a year of his pledge, Robert has done more than master the occult technology behind this machine. As prophesied in the dusty artifacts from the late inventor Dr.

Crane, he has also developed from this prototype an entire electric company that wreaks havoc on the global economy. A stock market report notifies the public:

“The Riddle of the Herne-Works Holds the Solution (*Lösung*)!”

The mysterious buildings, which the engineer Robert Herne erected six months ago, should go into operation immediately before the opening price. Speculators assert that the power plant serves to bring about a discovery, which will serve to convert all preexisting facilities for generation into vital force (*lebendigen Kraft*) with a single stroke.<sup>276</sup>

As stockholders worldwide spiral into panic over this seemingly salvific power source, an intertitle cuts immediately to the cause of the innovation and the upheaval: “Robert Herne, the creator of Bios-Works.”<sup>277</sup> Dressed in a bright-colored suit, Robert sits in an opulent office beneath the fluorescence of tubular light fixtures. Entering the great hall of his adjoining powerhouse, the “Hall of Eternal Power,” he paces with a cool repose amid towering transformers and giant interlocking wheels (Fig. 3.2). Having mastered mysterious light rays of Algol, Robert Herne has truly transformed from a dingy worker mystified by technology into an adept engineer, a modern magus adept in science and able to wield the technology of the future. Filled with grand hopes for the future, he soon reveals to his countrymen an ambitious plan: to replace the oppressive coalmining industry with his newly discovered, and inexhaustible, power source.

The *anamnesis* that hits the titular character in Galeen’s *Alraune* is particularly personal. Mischievous and precocious, the young Alraune (Brigitte Helm) matures into a witty teenage girl whose seductive beauty and impulsive wiles eerily echo the characteristics foretold by the alchemical legend of the mandrake. Still driven by his

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<sup>276</sup> Note how Brennert and Köhne stuffed into the scripted report doubled meanings with mystical overtones. Original: „Das Rätsel der Hernewerke vor der Lösung! /Die mysteriösen Bauten, welche der Ingenieur Robert Herne vor einem halben Jahre errichten ließ, sollen unmittelbar vor der Eröffnung stehen. Die Vermutung besteht, daß die Werke einer Erfindung dienen, die alle bisherigen Einrichtungen zur Erzeugung der lebendigen Kraft mit einem Schlag umstellt.“

<sup>277</sup> Original: „Robert Herne, der Schöpfer der Bios-Werke.“

insatiable desire to prove the occult myth yet also by his growing passion for the girl, the Privy Councilor ten Brinken, who has adopted Alraune as his daughter, records the girl's development in a secret journal. But as Alraune ripens into early adulthood, the biochemist becomes more restrictive, and obsessive, about what his subject does and where she goes. Eventually one night, when she is about to run away from home and elope with a handsome socialite, Alraune is shocked to discover her origins upon secretly reading her "father's" private journal. Coiled by the dismal lamplight of his empty study, the nymphet convulses in sobbing terror upon learning her true identity: "What a shame! An experiment from the whims of a cynical scientist – a child born of vice and crime. Where in the human race do I belong?"<sup>278</sup>

Then, bitter hatred overcomes Alraune's desperation. Her gleaming eyes pierce the darkness with resolve, she whispers: "I, the work of his own hands, will have my revenge on him."<sup>279</sup> Cancelling her plans to escape with her lover, Alraune remains with her fake father and, knowing his concealed devotion to her, agrees to travel the world with him. Yet despite her malicious attempt to bankrupt ten Brinken through her extravagant tastes, the biochemist seems only to acquire greater and greater wealth at gambling halls—that is, until the nymphet leaves his side. Not only does Alraune's revelatory moment mark the turning point in Galeen's film; the events following her resolve raise the ambiguity that haunts the entire plotline: Are these events mere coincidence, or does their sequence confirm the alleged power of the mandrake legend?<sup>280</sup> When Alraune responds to her

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<sup>278</sup> Original: „Welche Schande – ein Experiment aus der Laune eines zynischen Wissenschaftlers – ein Kind des Lasters und des Verbrechens. Wo ist mein Platz unter den Menschen?“

<sup>279</sup> Original: „Ich, sein eigenes Werk, werde mich an ihm rächen.“

<sup>280</sup> In Ewers' novel, this same notion of ambiguity drives ten Brinken into greater uncertainty as to whether his experiment was a success. When Alraune threatens to leave him, his estrangement ultimately leads him to suicide. The irony thus heightens the plotline's mystery regarding the young girl's nature. See Hanns Heinz Ewers, *Alraune: Die Geschichte eines lebenden Wesens* (München: Georg Müller Verlag GmbH, 1911/1916): 339-340.

devious mission to subvert her father's experiment, a new question emerges that raises the ambiguity about the success of ten Brinken's experiment. But whether or not Alraune is, as her name suggests, truly the mandrake which bestows riches upon her possessor, her will to embrace this identity demonstrate that, in an ironic sense, that the potency of the alchemical legend extends beyond the perverse obsessions of the hubristic biochemist.

The entire first half of Kornblum's *Wunder der Schöpfung* plays out as a series of scientific revelations that, throughout the history of mankind, has propelled him to glean ever-increasing familiarity about the phenomenological workings of the cosmos. Tracing the achievements of scientists ranging from Hans Lippershey to Galileo Galilee, and from Johannes Kepler to Isaac Newton, the film explores how—with greater rapidity and improved accuracy—these innovators were triggered by moments of sudden insight to develop inventions and theories such as the telescope, heliocentrism, the model for planetary motion, and gravity. In this process, moreover, this international ring of freethinking scientists brought twentieth-century astrophysics out of human ignorance and superstition and into its unparalleled glory of knowledge and enlightenment. Yet despite this seemingly naturalist perspective on these achievements, the visuals of the film portend mystical union between these scientists and their discoveries.

This notion becomes clearest when, at the culmination of these scientific achievements, two images are uncannily juxtaposed with one another. Implying that an esoteric inclination drives man's ancient desire to look to the heavens for knowledge and enlightenment, an intertitle reads: "Recent times are especially rich in astronomical research. The greatest sensation was Einstein's "Theory of Relativity," which explores

the relationship between movements, space, and time, and for the testing of which a special institution was set up in Potsdam” (Fig 3.3).<sup>281</sup> As the image of Einstein’s observatory, in all its avant-garde organic symmetry, stands in the middle of its open field, another intertitle interrupts this picturesque scene with the remark:

Thus, the science of astronomy has united all nations with a common task through centuries of labor. But a glimpse of the starry skies constantly gives a new revelation (*Offenbarung*) not only to those who think, but also to those perceptive people (*empfindenden Menschen*).<sup>282</sup>

Suddenly, the screen intercuts to an extreme long shot of a cliff towering over a prehistoric natural landscape. On it stands a primal man who, stretching out his arms, gropes for the night sky above him (Fig. 3.4). The visual association between Einstein’s observatory and the primal man’s hallowed cliff top are unmistakable. Later in the film, it is the culmination of this collective knowledge that allows fictitious space travelers to launch their own shuttle into the outer reaches of the galaxy.

Insinuating astrophysicists in memorial have turned to the heavens for their solace and enlightenment, this visual sequences assures the audience that, in spite of the international rivalries and conflicts of recent years, the scientific community is bound together in unflinching unity by its loftiest aim for scientific knowledge. The calling of astrophysicists is not inherently exclusive to white-coated experts in their ultramodern towers, but is something intuited, intrinsically deeper, and profoundly alien that instills into the seer a sense of humanitarian altruism. At the close of the sequence, a quote by Immanuel Kant confirms this presumption: “Two things fill the mind with ever new and

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<sup>281</sup> Original: „Die neuere Zeit ist besonders reich an astronomischen Forschungsergebnissen. Das größte Aufsehen erregte Einstein’s „Reletivitätstheorie“ welche die Beziehungen /zwischen Bewegungen, Raum und Zeit untersucht, und zu deren Prüfung bei Potsdam ein eigenes Institut errichtet wurde.“

<sup>282</sup> Original: „So hat die astronomische Wissenschaft in Jahrhunderte langer Arbeit alle Nationen zu gemeinsamer Aufgabe vereinigt. Aber nicht nur dem denkenden, sondern auch dem empfindenden Menschen gibt der Anblick des Sternenhimmels stets neue Offenbarung.“

increasing awe: ‘the starry heavens above me, and the moral law within me.’<sup>283</sup> In Kornblum’s film, no single moment of *anamnesis* marks the turning point of the filmic drama; rather, the identity of the human race is constantly formed, challenged, then reformed again through successful moments of revelatory knowledge.

Of all these films, Fritz Lang’s *Frau im Mond* is the only Weimar science fiction film to fall short of the allegorical rubric concerning *anamnesis*. At no moment during the course of the drama do its protagonists experience a moment in which a scientific reality evokes in them an existential crisis or an inspired desire to resolve their existential longing through the medium of technology. Rather, the *anamnesis* in *Frau im Mond* is implied to have occurred *before* the chronology of the film, when Prof. Manfeldt, by unknown means, is said to have first postulated his theories regarding the possibility of moon flight and gold reserves on the moon. At the beginning of both von Harbou’s novel and Lang’s film, the young astronomer and friend of Prof. Manfeldt, Wolf Helius, visits his old teacher at his humble abode: a rundown garret. Here, the harebrained genius has lived in solitude for thirty years,<sup>284</sup> rejected and ridiculed by the scientific community for his theories. Lang’s camera pan around the room shows, among other things, a long series of delirious sketches of moonscapes, recorded astronomical sightings, and

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<sup>283</sup> Original: „Zwei Dinge erfüllen das Gemüt mit immer neuer und zunehmender Bewunderung und Ehrfurcht: ,Der bestirnte Himmel über mir und das moralische Gesetz in mir.‘ (Emanuel Kant).“

<sup>284</sup> There appears to be a discrepancy between the dates in the novel and dates the film concerning Manfeldt’s intellectual exile. In the film, Manfeldt claims to have lived at the garret for thirty years: „Seit dreißig Jahren habe ich um meiner Ideen willen wie ein Hund – und dann kommt so ein Lausekerl, der auf mein Elend spekuliert, und will mir mein Manuskript als Kuriosität abkaufen – !“ Attesting to his assertion is a newspaper clipping posted to the wall of his apartment. Dated Thursday, 17 August 1896, the periodical features an article about Manfeldt’s controversial assertions, which, as shown through a flashback, the professor originally presented at an international astronomical conference. While von Harbou’s novel does not reiterate the flashback depicted in Lang’s film, it describes these events through the opening conversation between Helius and Manfeldt in the rundown garret. But here, Manfeldt claims to have been ousted some forty years ago (See n. 16 below).

mathematical formulae—all scribbled across the decrepit walls of the apartment as if by madman, or perhaps a visionary.<sup>285</sup>

Neither von Harbou's novel nor Lang's visuals depict any initial moment of revelation for the benign eccentric, but the professor himself makes clear that, notwithstanding his professional ostracization, he is still convicted of his theories, awaiting scientific approval by a younger, more imaginative generation. While Manfeldt does not disclose how exactly he drew his theories about moon flight or moon gold, throughout von Harbou's novel he refers to his grandiose ideas as "my dreams," often stumbling across his words in attempt to describe his visions:

Why – why did I not put an end to this life long ago, Helius? ...I will tell you. Being dead is nothing. But not being allowed to yearn any longer – that is true damnation. Yet oh, my dreams, my dreams! The mountains of the moon, translucent to my eyes, and all the veins, heavy with the streams of gold ... moon gold... coagulated blood in the veins of dead gods.... Deathful eternity all around.... No color, no plant, no comforting animal – nothing but blackness, horror, ice, and gold – and the deathful eternity of the moon, which it guards – *until mankind comes* –! For those dreams, Helius, I died forty years without being able to die....<sup>286</sup>

In depicting Manfeldt as an eccentric recluse whose ideas spurt between the extremes of ingenuity and credulity, in her novel von Harbou undulated between her character's

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<sup>285</sup> The end of Lang's camera pan underscores this wavering thought with an article which, featuring a caricature of Manfeldt, asks in its title: "Fool or imposter?" (*Narr oder Schwindler?*) Contrasting with Helius' acknowledgement of Manfeldt as his honorable professor, Lang's image sets forth the ambivalence characteristic of his and von Harbou's films with regard to the thin line between the scientific and the absurd, the latter most often associated with the occult.

<sup>286</sup> Original: „Warum – warum habe ich diesem Leben nicht schon längst ein Ende gemacht, Helius? ...Ich will es Ihnen sagen. Tot sein ist nichts. Aber sich nicht mehr sehnen dürfen, das ist die Verdammnis. Ach meine Träume, meine Träume! Die Gebirge des Mondes, durchscheinend für meine Augen, und alle der Adern, schwer von den Strömen des Goldes... Mondgold... gestocktes Blut in den Venen gestorbener Götter... Todesewigkeit ringsum... Keine Farbe, keine Pflanze, kein tröstliches Tier – nichts als Schwärze, Grauen, Eis und Gold – und die Todesewigkeit des Mondes, die es hütet – bis der Mensch kommt – ! Für diese Träume, Helius, bin ich vierzig Jahre lang gestorben, ohne sterben zu können....“ Thea von Harbou, *Frau im Mond*, ed. Rainer Eisfeld (München: Wilhelm Heyne Verlag GmbH, 1928/1989); 10.

scientific acumen and his less reasonable, often hazy assertions about the conditions of the moon.<sup>287</sup>

In both the film and novel, Helius is not the only expert who believes in the visionary Manfeldt. An international ring of tycoons, headed by a man who calls himself Walt Turner (Fritz Rasp), intercepts the project by confiscating the professor's decades-old manual for the flight and the astrophysicist's blueprints for a space shuttle.<sup>288</sup> Turner blackmails the scientists, claiming that he will destroy their plans unless Helius and Manfeldt permit the wealthy heisters to fund their project. In return, the tycoons demand all claim to any gold reserves found on the moon. Assuredly, during the course of their mission, it becomes obvious that these so-called "dreams" have not only reinvigorated in Manfeldt a will to continue living, they also soon prove clairvoyant when Manfeldt *does* fly to the moon, uncover moon gold, and (in the novel) set foot on the crumbling temple ruins of an ancient moon colony. A struggle then breaks out between Helius and Turner: while the former believes the reserves should remain a secret, the latter wants to exploit the resource at all possible costs.<sup>289</sup>

Lang's failure to realize the astronomer's clairvoyance in *Frau im Mond* belie the intense accuracy with which he had depicted the Gnostic moment of *anamnesis* just two years before during his collaboration with von Harbou on the set of *Metropolis*. Here, the hero of the story, Freder—a young engineer and the only son of the chief executive and architect of Metropolis (Alfred Abel)—discovers that every splendor about his father's

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<sup>287</sup> This early description by Manfeldt is not his only prophetic vision in von Harbou's novel; precipitating the flight of the moon, just before the rocket launch Manfeldt experiences a vision whose flamboyant description involves the early medieval European conception of the heavens: the sphere of the planets, the firmament of fixed stars, as well as the cherubim and seraphim (See von Harbou, *Frau im Mond* 103-105).

<sup>288</sup> Perhaps not coincidentally, Rasp's character bears an uncannily resemblance to the San Francisco newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst, equally notorious for his affluent connections and underhanded dealings.

<sup>289</sup> See von Harbou, *Frau im Mond* 154.

technologically advanced city is an elaborate deception. The audience knows what Freder does not: that below the libraries, stadiums, and theaters built for the sons of the executives of Metropolis is a complex of machine halls ran by an oppressed working class, which, rotating in ten-hour shifts, resides in a subterranean city beneath their dingy machine factories. Dressed in stark white, the amoral Freder chases after prostitutes in the “Eternal Gardens.” Here no sensual pleasure is withheld from him. Then, the outer doors of the Eternal Gardens suddenly swing open to present a virginal-motherly apparition: Maria. Surrounded by a group of proletarian children, she directs her call to Freder as well as the waif-like huddle: “Look! These are your brothers! …Look—! These are your brothers!”<sup>290</sup>

When the ringmaster of the Eternal Gardens attempts to divert his attention from the young woman and the children by ordering their exit, Freder, surveying the familiar landscape of genetically modified plants and artificial hills, tears through the doors in search for the girl. An intertitle then reads: “But this was the experience of Freder—the son of Joh Fredersen, the Master of Metropolis—during his search for the girl.”<sup>291</sup>

This “experience” is Freder’s discovery of the “Machine Halls” which lie below the airy residences of the city’s upper classes. Confused and forlorn, Freder loses his way among the giant turbines and generators. Then, turning a corner, he recoils at the sight of a particularly giant machine. Later identified as the “M-Machine,” it is manned by twelve black-clad workers who attend to its dials, blinking lights, and levers. Freder watches in wonder. Suddenly one worker collapses from exhaustion and the machine

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<sup>290</sup> Original: „Seht! Das sind Eure Brüder! / …Seht! Das sind Eurer Brüder!“

<sup>291</sup> Full original: „Dies aber war das Erleben Freders, Joh Fredersens, – des Herrn über Metropolis, Sohn – auf der Suche nach dem Mädchen.“

immediately overheats, spewing steam skyward as operators propel through the air. Enwreathed in steam, the behemoth transforms into a bull-like deity that Freder quickly identifies: “Moloch!” Freder’s hallucination morphs into a vision in which workers, cast into the machine’s gaping maw, descend to a fiery death (Fig. 3.5). Symbolically, the machine-god’s inexhaustible appetite consumes the lives of its operators, who, now stripped naked and bald, are whipped into submission and led up the stairs for the sacrificial rite. Then, masses of uniformed workers lockstep in rows of six up the stairs toward the mouth, marching like soldiers into the furnace.

Freder’s vision subsides. Staggering and carried on litters, the haunting silhouettes of workers pass before Freder, who grimaces at the shadowy procession as his contrasting white silk underscores his naivety and privileged otherness. As he flees the Machine Halls, this will be his first of many encounters with the anthropomorphic machines of his father’s city. But with each return into the depths of the city—again the Machinery Halls, then the Worker’s City, and, beyond that, two-thousand-year-old catacombs—Freder realizes that his father’s control over Metropolis is, in spite of appearances above, quite limited. During this quest to find the girl, the young engineer will overcome his fear of the phantasmal machines, not by his scientific expertise but rather by outwitting these industrial-age monsters.

#### *From Belief to Knowledge*

In their effort to produce a syncretic understanding of wisdom in various world traditions, the mystics in *fin-de-siècle* Central Europe returned to previously-recognized Gnostic philosophy in addition to the newfound texts and modern scholarship on the discoveries in the Orient. Rudolf Steiner, Franz Hartmann, Theodor Reuss, and other spiritual adepts

reached for the mystical commentaries of Plotinus, Pythagoras, and Philo of Alexandria in order to express, verify, and reconcile their own arcane experiences and the decorum of their societies with great spiritual masters of the past. By concentrating an application of their inner experiences into the outer world, these mystics, not contemporary scientists interested in occult phenomena, sought to use themselves as ever-expanding channels of occult power in the physical realm. While it cannot be asserted that Freder, Alraune, Robert Herne, or any of the other protagonists in the science fiction films of Weimar Germany could be considered literal “initiates” into the sacred mysteries of any arcane sect, an understanding of the mnemonic implications behind the Gnostic concept of *anamnesis* demonstrates that, symbolically, their revelations symbolize portrayals of non-ceremonial self-discovery.

For the spiritual seekers of *fin-de-siècle* Europe, the mystic path was one of subjective individuation. Not only did this peculiar approach to spirituality appeal to the modern consumerist mindset, it also reminded the adherents of these secret orders and occult societies that, ultimately, one’s spiritual sojourn could not be emulated or, for that matter, emulate that of another. Steiner held this conviction in his made commentary on the mystical strains of ancient Christianity:

My relationship to Christianity should make it clear that my science of the spirit is not attained by research of the kind attributed to me by many people. They intimate that I have put together a theory of spirit on the basis of ancient traditions. I am supposed to have elaborated Gnosticism and other teachings. The spiritual insight gained in *Christianity as Mystical Fact* is brought directly out of the world of spirit. It was only because I wished to demonstrate to the audience at lectures and to the readers of the book the harmony between what can be perceived in spirit and the records of history that I examined the latter and incorporated them in the content. But I took nothing from these documents unless

I had experienced it first in the spirit.<sup>292</sup>

As mentioned in Chapter One, Steiner studied and often critiqued the works of celebrated scholars. But while he was well read in the works of Assyriologists and Classicists like Arthur Drews, Ernst Troeltsch, and Adolf Harnack, he weighted exoteric observation with severe caution against his own mystical insight gleaned from the intense study of scriptures, apologetics, and, of course, his own mystical visions. (For this reason, Steiner did not consider himself or his philosophy “Gnostic.”)<sup>293</sup> Similar to Hartmann and others, he taught that the chief responsibility of the modern mystic was to individualize himself through the exercise of an *intuited* knowledge—a “teaching from within”—in addition to cognitive intellect.<sup>294</sup>

While the German-speaking mystics of the early twentieth century were right to distinguish between their occult doctrines and the asceticism of the ancient Gnostics, their overt distinctions belie their shared similarities, both implicitly and explicitly, with Valentinian, Basilidean, Manichean, and even Neo-Platonic Gnostic-Christian sects, as well as many modern scholars of Gnosticism, in their understanding and methods of how to access higher realms of existence.<sup>295</sup> In particular, Steiner observed that the

<sup>292</sup> Rudolf Steiner, Christopher Bamford, et. al., trans. *The Christian Mystery: Lectures* (Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1998): 14-15. Original lectures were given from 1904 to 1908.

<sup>293</sup> See commentary on Steiner’s worldview in Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore, MA: John Hopkins University Press, 2004):98.

<sup>294</sup> For reference to intuition as a “teaching from within,” see Max Heindel, *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception, or Mystical Christianity: An Elementary Treatise upon Man’s Past Evolution, Present Constitution and Future Development*. Fifteenth Edition. London: L.N. Fowler & Co., 1909/1929): 6. This work was translated into German by S. von der Wiesen as *Die Weltanschauung der Rosenkreuzer, oder Mystisches Christentum* (Leipzig: Theosophisches Verlagshaus, 1913). Franz Hartmann explained: “To become spiritual, physical health, intellectual growth, and spiritual activity should go hand in hand. Intuition should be supported by an unselfish intellect, a pure mind by a healthy form. How to accomplish this can neither be taught by a science which deals only with illusory effects, nor by a religious belief based upon illusions; but it is taught by Theosophy, the *Wisdom Religion* of the ages, whose foundation is truth, and whose practical application is the highest object of human existence.” See Franz Hartmann, *Magic White and Black: Or, the Science of Finite and Infinite Life Containing Practical Hints for Students of Occultism* Fourth Edition Revised (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1893/1910): 38.

<sup>295</sup> For the uncanny similarities between the teachings of Anthroposophy and the Valentinian Gnostics, see Christopher Bamford’s introduction to Steiner’s *The Christian Mystery* 9-10. A particularly useful work that exhibits Steiner’s knowledge of Valentinian, Basilidean, and Manichean Gnosticism is his *The Book of Revelation and the Work of the*

Hellenistic prolongation of Platonic philosophy influenced, along with pagan cults, the earliest Christian sects in a way that worked as a Gnostic spiritualization of the Egyptian mysteries. In their rituals and practices, then, the Gnostic-Christians followed Philo, the Jewish philosopher of Alexandria, who taught that for personal revelation the soul must come out of the ordinary “I” (microcosm), withdrawing from the distraction and deceptions of the physical realm and entering into direct communion with God (macrocosm).<sup>296</sup> Because it equipped the individual to discover his own purpose and the ultimate reality of the cosmos, mystics emulated this Gnostic dualistic conception of knowledge.

While this phenomenon was considered to have most often been induced artificially through meditative methods, mystics and scientists held that certain individuals were naturally inclined to clairvoyance and telepathic powers, observing that, for the person born into this world with extrasensory perception, life could present formidable challenges in terms of their communication and ascertainment of what others perceived as reality. Throughout his life, Steiner endured this hardship first hand. From his

*Priest: Eighteen Lectures, Conversations, and Question-and-Answer Sessions in Dornach from 5 to 22 September 1924.* J. Collis, trans. (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1998). The Rosicrucian Max Heindel (see below for biographic information) taught that the “Manichees” i.e., Manicheans) were nothing less than a higher order of Rosicrucians which, predating the Catholic Church, had preserved Christianity in its original esoteric form; see Heindel, *Cosmo-Conception* 418. Heindel cites Plato throughout his works, and Hartmann, though nothing is said explicitly of Plato or Plotinus in his *Magic*, his transcendentalism was undoubtedly influenced by their philosophical worldview. See also commentary in Cobb 31-32.

<sup>296</sup> In their investigation of ancient mystery schools and Gnosticism, scholars Gerard Bolland and Arthur Drews agreed that the early Christians used a similar sacramental approach to receiving revelation for scripture. As Drews observed in 1909, ascetics who devoted themselves entirely to this “inner life” would familiarize themselves with cosmic archetypes whose primordial wisdom, when compressed into everyday logic, would be recorded in the form of scriptural myth: “In Egypt the Therapeutes or Physicians, a religious association composed of Jews and their proselytes, with their headquarters in the neighborhood of Alexandria, sought in this manner, as Philo informs us in his work ‘On the Contemplative Life,’ to give effect to the claims of religion as expressed by Philo himself. Their religious observances resembled those of the Orphic-Pythagorean sects, as in abstinence from flesh and wine, admiration for virginity, voluntary poverty, religious feasts and community singing, and the use of white garments. /They made a deep study of the mystical writings of revelation that had been handed down, and these they used as a guide in the allegorical explanation of the Mosaic law” (Drews, *The Christ Myth* 51-52). By the direct experience of gnosis, the adept attuned his physical faculties into a spiritual channel through which his transcendental experiences became transmitted into scripture as metaphorical expression, scriptural fable, and poetic language amenable to the confines of human logic—i.e. the inspired Word (*Logos*).

childhood, his simultaneous pursuit of the natural sciences and metaphysics stemmed from his own struggle to come to terms with what he called “my perception of the spiritual world.”<sup>297</sup> As a young schoolboy, he was immensely stimulated by his introduction to geometry, quickly realizing that its application legitimated, for the first time, his own experience of the unseen, transcendental reality. Though he excelled in the scientific studies into which his father guided him during his studies at the technical university in Vienna, Steiner nevertheless chose to study philosophy and, eventually, the arts since these disciplines seemed to offer him a bridge between his experience of the spiritual world and his academic knowledge of the natural one.<sup>298</sup>

Sharing this holistic vision with Steiner, other esoteric schools professed that psychical energies might be channeled through certain sacramental pieces which could then house occult powers. Among the initiates of Fraternitas Saturni beginning in 1928, this concept kindled a growing fascination with electrical instruments meant to enhance or to influence extrasensory phenomena. Usually associated with certain teachings concerning “etheric waves” within the Tantric chakra system, lodge members experimented with such phenomena as high-frequency sound, the discharge of electromagnetic fields, so-called “Tesla energy,” ozonization of the atmosphere, and ultraviolet light rays. But though little information is disclosed regarding these instruments, the most notorious was the Tepahone (*Tepaphon*). Described at length by the hermetic philosopher Franz Bardon, this instrument resembled an electronic magic

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<sup>297</sup> Cited in Treitel, *A Science for the Soul* 98.

<sup>298</sup> As Steiner later put it: “I had to study mathematics and natural sciences. I was convinced that I should find no relationship between these and myself unless I could place under them a solid foundation of philosophy. But I perceived a spiritual world, none the less, as a reality. In clear vision the spiritual individuality of everyone revealed itself to me. This found in the physical body and in action in the physical world merely its manifestation. It united itself with that which came down as a physical germ from the spiritual world. Dead men I followed farther on their way in the spiritual world.” Cited in Treitel, *A Science for the Soul* 98.

lantern, yet, when charged with psychic energy, supposedly projected an intense vital force onto a particular person in order to induce well-being, sickness, or even death.<sup>299</sup>

While their members accepted these abilities as proof of extrasensory faculties, the Anthroposophical Society, Fraternitas Saturni, and other esoteric schools were not alone in intuiting an occult dynamic between applied science and the individual's quest for self-knowledge. As discussed in the last chapter, Karl Zöllner, Ludwig Deinhard, and a number of other scientists (not to mention, theoretical scholars like Eduard von Hübbecke-Schleiden and Andrzej Niemojewski) avidly sought ways to measure empirically the frequencies and impulses of psychical activity. Into the Weimar Republic, this professional quest for the "self" grew increasingly shrill, and popular, in the annals of parapsychology. From 1913 to 1925, the Munich physician Albert von Schrenck-Notzing developed a highly complex method for photographing spiritistic materializations ranging from ectoplasm to auric fields. During the 1920s, his focus turned to the Austrian mediums Rudi and Willi Schneider, who were reputed to channel spirits and to levitate.<sup>300</sup> In the course of his investigations, Schrenck-Notzing developed an electrical device (Fig. 3.6) that, wired to light bulbs, was intended to convert the brothers' mediumistic discharge into storable energy. In Berlin in 1922, parapsychologist Fritz Grunewald invented a sophisticated instrument on which medium Ejner Nielsen was able to deflect a metal needle with the exertion of willpower (Fig. 3.7).<sup>301</sup>

Such technology calls to mind the technological devices and methods in *Algol*,

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<sup>299</sup> From the limited sources on the F.S., the extent to the use of this machine in the lodge's ceremonies and practices remains unknown. See Stephen E. Flowers, *Fraternitas Saturni: The Brotherhood of Saturn; An Introduction to its History, Philosophy, and Rituals* Third Edition (Smithville, TX: Runa-Raven Press, 2006): 60-61.

<sup>300</sup> Schrenck-Notzing's experiments with the Schneider brothers were thoroughly documented in Harry Price, *Rudi Schneider: A Scientific Examination of his Mediumship* (London: Methuen & Co., 1930).

<sup>301</sup> See Treitel, *A Science for the Soul* 136-138.

*Metropolis*, *Alraune*, and *Frau im Mond* used to divine, harness, and convert various occult forces into energy readily measured and quantified by scientific experimentation, but the examples of Schrenck-Notzing and Grunewald demonstrate that the members of Anthroposophy and Fratenitas Saturni were not alone in believing one could manipulate *scientific* knowledge in bringing about his *spiritual* vision. Into the 1920s in Germany and elsewhere in Europe, the scientific interest in occult phenomena was trending increasingly to the investigation of the human body as the channel of transcendental forces. These esoteric schools and psychical researchers merely represent the general enthusiasm in German-speaking Europe that turned to the trappings of technology in order to give their psychical experiments a gloss of objectivity.<sup>302</sup> This mystical endeavor reflects not only his own philosophical implication that the human soul might use its body as a tool to convey transcendental realities into the physical realm; it reflects, as Steiner himself acknowledged, a distinctly Western spiritual practice by which the individual (microcosm) uses its faculties of self-expression to give meaning to the universe (macrocosm).<sup>303</sup>

But whereas psychical investigators and the public were fundamentally interested in *epistemic* knowledge of technology, the leaders of German-speaking Europe's esoteric schools were driven primarily by a pursuit of *ontological* knowledge. Carefully distinguishing between gnosis and intellect as two separate (but not mutually exclusive) types of knowledge, Reuss described the tedious path which the Gnostic Neo-Christians

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<sup>302</sup> A larger study is needed to elaborate the extent and increasingly “scientific” acceptance of occult phenomena among lay Germans during the 1920s and in the shadow of the Great War. Much research has already been expounded in Treitel, “Chapter Six: Occult Sciences and their Applied Doubles” in *A Science for the Soul* (132-161).

<sup>303</sup> This preoccupation of microcosm-macrocosm is distinct to Western esotericism. See, for instance, Steiner's commentary on the decisive break of the Greeks and Romans with previous epochs in Egypt, India, and Babylon in their own cosmology in Steiner, Norman Macbeth, trans. *Egyptian Myths and Mysteries* (Spring Valley, NY: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1971): 60-61.

of the O.T.O. passed to spiritual insight. Reinforcing the significance of experience over expectation when groping for higher realms of wisdom, he noted:

The external theoretical knowledge is not to be despised. It is a tool to the seeker for true knowledge, but the actual theosophy and knowledge of God and knowledge of self is not to be found in the teachings of evolution theories and systems, about the condition of the dwellers in the middle-region or of the heavens and other such things of which are oft spoken. Rather, each person reaches his own inner perception and self-knowledge of the mysteries of God in nature, in the cosmos. In strong impulses from the top down to the center of the body, there you will find the seed that comes to maturation through the light!<sup>304</sup>

Less concerned than their counterparts in proving the scientific validity of psychometry, clairvoyance, and telepathy, mystics such as Reuss, Steiner, Hartmann, and others sought an existential transformation known intrinsically through experience and, by extension, through expression in one's vocation and talents.<sup>305</sup> More than a sacramental performance, a truly profound rearrangement of one's worldview was necessary for obtaining unquantifiable, ineffable self-knowledge.

If in esoteric schools and psychical research the human body increasingly represented the chief transmitter of occult power, then in Weimar science fiction the protagonist's "tool" towards transcendence was represented in technology itself. In each film, it is this same technology that physically "manifests" the protagonist's spark of scientific insight, representing his sudden and unexpected salvific knowledge—much as *anamnesis*

<sup>304</sup> Original: „Das äußere theoretische Wissen ist nicht zu verachten; es ist ein Hilfsmittel für den Sucher nach wahrer Erkenntnis, aber die eigentliche Theosophie und Gotteserkenntnis und Selbsterkenntnis besteht nicht darin, dass man gelehrt über Evolutionstheorien und Systeme, über die Zustände der Bewohner der Mittelregion oder des Himmels und andere derlei Dinge reden kann, sondern dass man selbst zur eigenen innerlichen Wahrnehmung und Selbsterkenntnis der Geheimnisse Gottes in die Natur, im Weltall gelangt. Dränge von oben nach unten in den Mittelpunkt des Körpers, dort wirst du einen Keim finden, der durch das Licht zum Wachstum kommt!“ Reuss 73.

<sup>305</sup> Initiation into higher realms of knowledge need not occur through any particular esoteric school or secret society. One thinks of the protagonists in Weimar's science fiction cinema when reading Steiner's words on human evolution and its spiritual unfoldment: "Development is possible, even to the point of living into the higher worlds. That is initiation. And in the Mystery Schools methods of initiation are given into men's hands just as in ordinary life the methods of the chemical laboratory or of biological research are made available. The difference is only this: external science has to prepare instruments and other apparatuses for its use, while he who would become an initiate has but one instrument to perfect, namely himself in all his forces. Just as the force of magnetism can lie dormant in iron, so there slumbers in the human soul the power to penetrate into the spiritual world of light and sound" (Steiner, "Introductory Lecture" in *The Apocalypse of St. John* 19).

prompted ancient Gnostics in composing their scriptures, rituals, and other practices. In the films of Galeen, Kornblum, Lang, and Werckmeister, *anamnesis* is most frequently represented as a violent shock—symbolically the awakening of one’s spiritual faculties, and the inner warfare incurred on oneself by the determined neophyte. While at present there is limited proof that the screenwriters and directors behind these films drew from these famous mystics for their inspiration, both groups allude to arcane solutions to the alienation of the psyche in the industrial age that bear uncanny resemblance to the ancient teachings of Gnosticism.

The most opportune example of *anamnesis* in Weimar science fiction is Lang and von Harbou’s portrayal of Freder’s experience in the Machine Halls of Metropolis. While this scene can readily be likened to Jesus of Nazareth’s temptation in the wilderness or Siddhartha Gautama’s escape from his palace,<sup>306</sup> Lang and von Harbou simultaneously referenced within its paradoxical dialectic a story long valued by Gnostics and students of

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<sup>306</sup> While numerous scholars have compared the character Freder to a Christ figure (see e.g. Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity* [London: British Film Institute, 2000]: 68-76), none have indicated that von Harbou’s script for this scene is lifted almost directly from the “Four Sights of the Buddha,” a myth that, like Christ’s journey into the wilderness, epitomizes all the allegorical terrors that beset the novice spiritual seeker. In Buddhism, the “Four Sights” are the encounters described in the legendary account of Siddhartha Gautama’s life which led to his realization of the impermanence and ultimate disappointment of conditioned existence. Before these encounters, Siddhartha had since birth been confined in a great palace by his father, who, wishing to mold his son into a great ruler like himself, raised his son in complete ignorance of the fragility and temporality of human life. Because his father had forbidden his servants tell his son anything at all about sorrow and pain, Prince Siddhartha knew only about the sensual pleasures of life and the ennobled qualities of human civilization. One day, however, Siddhartha’s charioteer led him outside the palace walls. Riding through the kingdom, the young prince was dismayed by the ghastly sights before him. As his charioteer explained to him that what he witnessed were old age, sickness, death, and privation, Siddhartha felt himself filled with *samvega*, or the sudden sense of shock, anxiety, and spiritual urgency to reach liberation and escape the cycle of reincarnation. Given von Harbou’s love for Eastern religions, there is no doubt she was fully conscious of this Buddhist legend when composing her novel and screenplay for *Metropolis*. Also like the legend of the Four Sights, von Harbou’s novel tells that this is the young man’s first time alone. His life of privilege is so marked by constant surveillance that the walls of his house are cobbled with secret eyeholes through which his servants peer. Not only do his servants wait to satisfy his every whim, they also monitor his every move to his father (Thea von Harbou, *Metropolis* (Berlin: August Scherl Verlag GmbH, 1926): 11-12). Though in the futuristic retelling Freder witnesses a single industrial catastrophe, its horrific visuals depict an intense level of human suffering that compel Freder, similar to Siddhartha, to question everything his father has led him to believe about his technocratic city. Similar to Siddhartha’s moment of *samvega*, it is Freder’s Gnostic *anamnesis* that prompts him to challenge his father and to enlighten those who suffer in ignorance beyond the palace walls.

Gnosticism well into the twentieth century: Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave.”<sup>307</sup> Lang and von Harbou’s allusion to Plato’s cave is significant not merely because of its ironic transliteration into the imprisoning effect of industrial modernism but particularly because their reiteration of this allegory re-emphasizes Plato’s point that the philosopher, or seeker of authentic self-knowledge, must learn to distinguish between *true belief* and *true knowledge*. But while Freder unwittingly assumes the role of the enlightened philosopher descending into the cave, his allegorical ‘return’ to the prisoner-like workers in the Machine Hall results in *his* visionary experience—the M-Machine’s manifestation as Moloch—reminiscent of Plato’s description of the animals projected onto the wall by men passing over the parapet. At the same moment, Freder, like the liberated prisoner, is given no choice regarding his shocking liberation. He is metaphorically turned away from his illusions and exposed to the true nature his father’s city: its downtrodden workers and the bloodthirsty machines that devour them.<sup>308</sup>

Lang and von Harbou, then, portrayed Freder as the enlightened *and* the prisoner simultaneously in order to demonstrate something more profound than the melodramatic collision of capital and labor. It also demonstrates, according to Plato’s allegory, the inception of material darkness (the workers in their black-denim uniforms) by spiritual light (Freder in his white-silken clothes). Yet it is Freder, the engineer allegedly acquainted with the inner workings of the M-Machine, who quite literally experiences the “electrification”—analogous to Plato’s description of *anamnesis*—that should startle the prisoner upon the realization that he is, contrary to his prior beliefs, very ignorant of

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<sup>307</sup> For Plato’s Allegory of the Cave, see Book VII of his *Republic* translated in Forrest E. Baird, ed. *Volume I: Ancient Philosophy*, Sixth Edition (Boston, MA: Prentice Hall, 2003/2011): 283-288.

<sup>308</sup> In her novel, von Harbou described in great detail that with each ten-hour shift the machines of Metropolis ‘cry out’ to be fed human flesh. See e.g. von Harbou, *Metropolis* 20: „Metropolis erhob ihre Stimme. Die Maschinen von Metropolis brüllten; sie wollten gefuttert sein.“

himself and the world around him. According to Plato, the prisoner's sudden "electrification" and ensuing memory represents the student's sudden recall of his immaterial preexistence with the primordial Forms. In the allegory, then, this awakening from ignorance signifies the neophyte's first step away from true belief (associated with materiality/the shadows) and toward true knowledge (associated with abstraction/the sunlight).<sup>309</sup> While at this point the nature of Freder's vision remains ambivalent, his later encounters with phantasmal machines confirms that his vision is, far from a neurasthenic delusion, truly a shadowy reflection of an abstracted evil.

This argument will be elucidated later in the chapter, but here it is significant to note that the Christ-like Freder shares with the workers in the explosion—in addition to an apparent telepathically transmitted psychosomatic pain—a moment of *anamnesis*.<sup>310</sup> Yet after both Freder and the workers are stricken with the psychosomatic doubt Plato used to describe the moment of *anamnesis*, only Freder remains cognizant that a higher power lies behind the explosion in the Machine Halls. As new workers replace the injured ones, Freder flees therefore to what he believes the only solution to the catastrophe, his own father. It is here that Lang and von Harbou entwined their retelling of Plato's original legend with an overtly Gnostic interpretation, one which, finding its origins in the mystical writings of the third-century Christian Plotinus, inspired numerous nineteenth- and twentieth-century mystics including Reuss, Steiner, and Hartmann.<sup>311</sup> Whereas Plato

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<sup>309</sup> In his dialogue *Meno*, Plato describes this revelatory recollection as having a numbing effect on the initiate, like that of a torpedo-fish—which is known to emit electric shocks. See Baird 163-164, 175. For a discussion of Platonic *anamnesis* to electrification in the context of aesthetics, see Andrea Gleiniger, "Of Mirrors, Clouds, and Platonic Caves: 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Spatial Concepts in Experimental Media," in Georg Vrachliotis, et. al. *Stimulation: Presentation Technique and Cognitive Method* (Boston, MA: Birkhäuser Publishers, 2008): 29-62. Though Gleiniger discusses Weimar culture's spatial representations in photography and cinema at length—including Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's works and Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Die Symphonie einer Großstadt* (1927), he makes no mention of Lang's *Metropolis*; still, the implications of his discussion certainly apply to this scene. See esp. 39-41.

<sup>310</sup> Thus Freder's shock has doubled symbolism as both Buddhist *samvega* and also Gnostic *anamnesis*.

<sup>311</sup> Neo-Platonism influenced many Germans in the Romantic tradition, including Goethe, Schilling, Schelling, and

had intended his illustration of *anamnesis* as fundamentally an *epistemic* assertion, the early Gnostic-Christians and subsequent mystics explained that *anamnesis* was something wholly *ontological*, considering it the closest the human mind could come to experiencing the freedom of the psyche prior to its descent of the soul into matter, its latest incarnation, and its divine origins.<sup>312</sup>

When collaborating on the set of *Metropolis*, in other words, Lang and von Harbou intended Freder's witness of the explosion in the Machine Halls not as any ordinary trauma but instead as a symbolic moment of spontaneous Gnostic illumination. In this revelatory instant, Freder, analogous to the newly initiated neophyte seeking entrance into the mysteries of his own existence, receives his salvific vision in which he embarks on a psychical journey that eventually puts him into contact with the original—and divine—component of his human nature. Indeed, while Lang and von Harbou hearkened to particular myths in the Christian and Buddhist religious traditions, there is a yet deeper significance behind their portrayal of the young man's shattered perspective of the world—one which the German mystics of the early twentieth century associated with initiation into ancient Gnostic mysteries and the way to true self-knowledge.<sup>313</sup>

Just as the mystics of the twentieth century noted that the Neoplatonic interpretation of the Allegory of the Cave provides an opportune illustration for the reconciliation between

Hegel. Its influence is also obvious throughout Rudolf Steiner, H. Collison ed., *Christianity as Mystical Fact: And the Mysteries of Antiquity* Third Edition (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1914): see esp. 77-78; and Steiner, Christopher Bamford, et. al., trans. *The Christian Mystery: Lectures* (Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1998): see esp. his treatment of Goethe and Schiller with Plato on 67. See also commentary on Plato in Heindel, *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception* 85, 167, 291. Reuss was also heavily influenced by Platonic philosophy, leading one acquaintance to characterize him as a "platonic socialist." Ellic Howe, "Theodor Reuss: Irregular Freemasonry in Germany, 1900-23," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 91 (1978): 31.

<sup>312</sup> See the discussion of Neo-Platonism in early Christianity in Hanegraaff 834-835.

<sup>313</sup> Steiner weaved Platonic and Gnostic wisdom in an essay published from July through September 1903, entitled "Einweihung und Mysterien." This material was republished in Rudolf Steiner, *Lucifer-Gnosis, 1903-1908: Grundlegende Aufsätze zur Anthroposophie und Berichte aus den Zeitschriften Luzifer und Lucifer-Gnosis* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1987): 34-65.

the spiritual and the material found in occult practices and Gnostic teachings, its dialectic also applies roughly to the transcendental nature of technology as portrayed in the science fiction films of Weimar Germany. Before his *anamnesis*, the protagonist is a neophyte driven by an intrinsic desire to know more about the environment around him. For Robert, the desire is to know more about his suspicious boarder; for Alraune, to know more about ten Brinken's journal; for the innovative scientists, a curiosity about the cosmos; for Prof. Manfeldt, the discovery of moon gold; for Freder, curiosity about a mysterious young lady. Immediately after his *anamnesis*, his moment of enlightenment reveal to him that his enlightenment brings with it knowledge which transforms himself. This is because, as each narrative discloses, his knowledge about the universe makes the protagonist more conscious of how he experiences daily reality.

Each character's transformation might be understood analogous to Plato's Allegory of the Cave. Consider the interception of transcendental truth as the prisoner's act of being turned around (i.e., having one's perspective altered), the sudden insight as the shock of *anamnesis*, and the process of familiarizing oneself with technology or theory as the mastery of one's senses upon exiting the cave.

Fact (truth) → Insight (*anamnesis*) → Technology / Scientific Theory (mastery)

The protagonist thus realizes that his discovery changes as much about himself as his perception of the universe. The protagonist need not be a scientist (e.g. Alraune) nor necessarily make an original discovery of science (e.g. Freder), but the unfoldment of knowledge which awakens the individual from his ignorance must raise his awareness of previously imperceptible scientific underpinnings of the world around him, thus

challenging him to choose whether to apply his revelatory knowledge to greater ends.<sup>314</sup>

Similar to the Gnostic emphasis on the individual's mastery of his physical body in order to access the realm of his spiritual reality, the filmmakers used the image of technology as a microcosmic power source by which the protagonist divined, harnessed, and converted extrasensory forces of the macrocosmic universe into the realm of the mundane—not for himself alone, but for all those within reach of his scientific discovery.

#### “THE LIGHT BRINGER”

In order to discuss the allegorical source of symbolic power that underlies the machines and other technological devices of Weimar science fiction, it is necessary to observe the links between the esoteric philosophies of early twentieth-century mystics and how, in conjunction with certain Gnostic teachings, the filmmakers in question brought their occult worldview into the new medium of cinema. Like other esoteric schools embracing certain Theosophical tenets, the Anthroposophical Society, Ordo Templi Orientis, Rosicrucian Society, and Fraternitas Saturni maintained explanations concerning the origins of man and the universe which both coincided with and were influenced by Gnostic mythology. Even in ancient Gnosticism, these religious parables vary widely in their vivid, and often violent, portrayals of this primeval history. But all of their mythologies refer to *Aeons*, intermediate deific beings, often called emanations, who exist between humanity and the ultimate, “True God” (explained in the next chapter).<sup>315</sup>

Together with the True God, these deific beings comprise the realm of the *Pleroma* (a

<sup>314</sup> Note that each protagonist must choose for himself whether to act on his vision of reality. Maria's affection and the Empress's guarantees of peaceful labor-capital relations in *Algol*, the persecution of Galileo in *Wunder der Schöpfung*, the ridicule of Prof. Manfeldt in *Frau im Mond*, the eligible suitor in *Alraune*, and the security of bourgeois paradise in Metropolis all hinder the protagonists from acting on the revelatory knowledge that has come before them through science.

<sup>315</sup> In the various systems of ancient Gnosticism, Aeons are differently named, classified, and described, but the emanation theory itself is common to all sects. They are explained to exist in layers, like the petals of a rose, between human beings and the True God.

Greek term meaning “fullness” of being or light) wherein the potency of divinity operates fully. The fullness and light of the Pleroma exists in direct contrast to mankind’s existential state, which in comparison may be considered emptiness and darkness.<sup>316</sup>

In their screenplays and novels for *Algol* and *Metropolis*, Hans Brennert, Fridel Köhne, and Thea von Harbou modeled the mysterious technological messengers to humanity—the alien Algol and the scientist-alchemist Rotwang, respectively—after a specific Gnostic archetype known properly as the “Light Bringer” (Greek: *Eosphorus*) or the “Bearer of Light,” but more commonly referred to as Lucifer. Central to understanding the cosmogony and anthropogony of the Gnostic worldview, the role of Lucifer was particularly influential on the esoteric schools of the early twentieth century in German-speaking Europe and, later, in Weimar fantasy and science fiction. The figureheads of the Gnostic revival pointed both to canonical and apocryphal accounts to prove that Lucifer, far from the common Judeo-Christian interpretation, was not a malevolent entity that led mankind astray from perfection starting in the Garden of Eden; instead, he represented (and *continues* to represent) a pivotal turning point in the expanding consciousness of mankind to greater self-knowledge. In *Algol* and *Metropolis*, and similarly in the fantasy films of Weimar Germany, the luciferic archetype was implemented as a symbol of mystical-technological knowledge which, when conferred onto man, enables him to transcend his previously constrictive limitations.

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<sup>316</sup> For variations of this account in each of these societies, see Heindel, *Cosmo-Conception* 177-182, esp. diagram 6 on p. 178; Flowers 30-32; Steiner, „Die Gnostischen Grundlagen des Vorchristentums: Imagination von Europa; Dornach, 15. Juli 1923,“ *Drei Perspektiven der Anthroposophie: Kulturphaenomene, Geisteswissenschaftlich Betrachtet; Zwölf Vorträge, gehalten in Dornach zwischen dem 5. Mai und 23. September 1923* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1990): 116-120. There is a detailed discussion of the Pleroma as it pertained to Gnostic Christianity and other ancient strains of mystery religions in W.F. Cobb, *Mysticism and the Creed* (London: McMillan & Co., 1914): 340. Cobb’s book, like the work of Mead, is included in this study for its strong reliance on the ancient Gnostic tradition in its scope, for its referral to almost exclusively German scholarship on Gnosticism, and for its wide popularity among heterodox groups in Europe.

*Out of the Past*

As the previous chapter indicates, the filmmakers who developed the German Expressionist style of architectural composition and pictorial lighting put as much weight on the visual qualities of a film as on its narrative structure. The strong overtones of struggles between light and darkness in the visuals, dialogues, and narrative devices in the science fiction films are, then, neither a coincidence nor a simplification of the good and evil forces at work in their filmic narratives. More than a hyperbolic ploy of German Expressionism, their melodramatic contrasts of dualistic forces hint at their narratives' deep kinship with the mystical vein of ancient Gnostic myths, viz. the struggle of life over death. European mystics of the early twentieth century often noted that, in their myths, the ancient Gnostics frequently identified both the human soul and consciousness with a light, a spark, or a flame, since, in its mystical worldview, the human constitutes the strongest concentration of divine consciousness in the material realm.<sup>317</sup>

Sharing this worldview, modern mystics claimed that during the geological forming of the earth the spirits of humanity descended from the Pleroma and, in the process of forming the planet's environs, settled themselves into materiality. At Berlin in November 1904—just one year after German archaeologists discovered the Turfan texts—Rudolf Steiner gave a lecture on the ancient worldview of Manichaeism, explaining its dualistic conception of the origins and the nature of man paralleled the doctrines of Western

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<sup>317</sup> Mystical orders and occult societies also identified the soul with light or the spark. See e.g. the emphasis on the oil lamp in Rosicrucian symbolism in the preface to Max Heindel, *The Rosicrucian Christianity Lectures* Fifth Edition (Oceanside, CA: Rosicrucian Fellowship, 1939/2012); and the significance for the flame as a divine spark in the O.T.O. in Theodor Reuss, *Der Kleine Theodor Reuss Reader* (München: P.R. Koenig 1917/1993). Steiner also likens Platonic mysticism to Gnostic thought for its comparison of the soul to a spark or flame; see Rudolf Steiner, H. Collison ed., "Chapter Four: Plato as a Mystic" *Christianity as Mystical Fact* 63.

esotericism. In particular, he highlighted the well-known “Temple Legend.” According to Steiner, its story

tells us that one time the spirits of darkness wanted to take the kingdom of light by storm. They actually reached the borders of the kingdom of light and hoped to conquer it. But they failed to achieve anything. Now they were to be punished – and that is a very significant feature which I beg you to take account of – they were to be punished by the kingdom of light. But in this realm there was nothing which was in any way evil, there was only good. Thus the spirits of darkness could only have been punished with something good. So what happened? The following: The spirits of light took a part of their own kingdom and mixed it with the materialized kingdom of darkness. Because there was now a part of the kingdom of light mingled with the kingdom of darkness, a leaven had been introduced into the kingdom of darkness, a ferment which produced a chaotic, whirling dance whereby it continually consumes itself and thus carries within itself the germ of its own destruction. It is further related that just because of this, the race of mankind was brought into existence. Primeval man represents just what was sent down from the kingdom of light to mix with the kingdom of darkness and to conquer, through death, what should not have been there; to conquer it within its own being.<sup>318</sup>

Steiner was not alone in discussing the allegory behind this legend. Immediately after the discovery of the Turfan texts in 1903, Max Heindel noted that a similar myth recounting a primeval invasion of “Night Elves” on the kingdom of “Light Elves” had been long reiterated in the early-modern teachings of Rosicrucianism. In equating Manichaean Gnosticism with the Rosicrucian doctrine of esoteric Christianity, Heindel went so far as to claim that this and other doctrinal parallels indicated that the Rosicrucian Order was a direct progeny of the ancient sect.<sup>319</sup>

This ancient tale and its arcane moral bears striking similarity to Thea von Harbou’s screenplay for the fantasy film *Der müde Tod* (Destiny) directed by her husband Fritz Lang in 1921. Its story tells of a girl who discovers her lover has been taken to Death’s castle. It is not just the theme of the film, of Love against Death, or the premise of the

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<sup>318</sup> Delivered in the lecture “Manicheism” (Berlin, 11 November 1904) in Rudolf Steiner, John M. Wood, trans., *The Temple Legend: Freemasonry and Related Occult Movements* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1985): 62-64.

<sup>319</sup> For a detailed version of the elves myth, see Heindel, *Cosmo-Conception* 418-419.

transmigration of the soul after death, that has a Gnostic provenance, but the *imagery* of the film. The manner in which Lang handles the material of the girl seeing, under the influence of the psychotropic, the transparent, supernatural images of souls entering the region beyond the wall, the domain of death, is thoroughly Gnostic (Fig. 3.8). Death in the film is a weary and downhearted figure, looking after the candles of human life that inevitably flicker out—a portrayal aptly faithful to the Gnostic association of bodily death with the inertia of the material realm.<sup>320</sup> When the girl begs for the life of her lover, Death offers her a chance to save him and, pointing out three candles whose lights have begun to flicker, stipulates that she may have the life of her lover back if she can save one of the lives those three candles represent.

Declaring that love can conquer death, the girl accepts the challenge. The film recounts the tales of the girl's efforts to save her lover. In each of the three, the girl and her lover are reincarnated in different settings as two young lovers whose monarchs declared war on their love—in a Muslim city of the Middle East, in Renaissance Venice, and in ancient China—and in all three reincarnations the young man dies, as the girl is always too late to defeat death. Not only is the depiction of the soul questing for freedom in a hostile environment reminiscent of the temple legend, but the heterodox theme of reincarnation, as well as the three cities' connection to occult interests, also reflect the general Gnostic yearning for the psychic redemption of the material realm. The film ends when the girl, having been given one more chance to save her lover, is consumed in a

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<sup>320</sup> See e.g. G.R.S. Mead's discussion of the Gnostic conception of the human psyche and its decent into the physical body in his *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten: Some Short Sketches among the Gnostics, Mainly of the First Two Centuries: A Contribution to the Study of Christian Origins based on the Most Recently Recovered Materials* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1900): 328-329; see also his commentary on reincarnation (*ibid.* 231-232) as well as “the After-death State of the Uninitiated Righteous” and “Of Those who Repent and again Fall Back” (*ibid.* 491-492). See also the discussion of ancient esoteric Christianity's perspective on the necessity of reincarnation in Cobb 492-495.

hospital fire. But she maintains her integrity in refusing to trade an infant's life for that of her lover. The girl herself dies in the fire; her and her lover's souls are reunited as their transparent images climb a hill and stand against the sky. This reunion of the man and woman's souls, in Gnostic terms, symbolizes the non-corporeal fusion of individual's conscious (soul) and unconscious (spirit) halves, respectively, and its return to the flame (pleromic center) whence it came.<sup>321</sup>

Filled with the paradox and contradiction indicative of their later collaboration in *Metropolis* and *Frau im Mond*, Lang and von Harbou's *Der müde Tod* reiterates the temple legend's allegory of the divine spark and its primordial descent into matter as well as its reconciliation of life and death. Significantly, the moral implications in the girl's challenge to death parallels Steiner's own observations regarding the temple legend's take on the nature of good and evil. For Steiner, the profound thought which lies in the Gnostic temple legend was that the kingdom of darkness must be overcome by the kingdom of light, not by means of punishment, but through mildness; not by resisting evil, but by uniting with it in order to redeem evil as such. "Because a part of the light enters into evil," he noted, "the evil itself is overcome."<sup>322</sup> In other words, the Gnostic key to redemption, like the resolution to reincarnation, lies in the channeling of one's spiritual faculties, the divine spark, through the physical incarnation which ties man to ignorance, i.e. spiritual darkness.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> For similar assessment of *Der müde Tod*, see R. Bruce Elder, "Gnostic Lang" in Robert Haller, ed. *Fritz Lang 2000* (New York, NY: Anthology Film Archives, 2000): 50-51.

<sup>322</sup> Steiner, "Manicheism," *The Temple Legend* 64.

<sup>323</sup> Steiner further clarified his point in "Lucifer the Bearer of Light, Christ the Bringer of Love" (a lecture delivered in Dusseldorf on 30 March 1096) in *The Christian Mystery* 105: "A 'good' power can be in some connection can be an 'evil' power in other situations. We need to think only the natural phenomenon of fire. We must be grateful for fire because of the endless ways in which it helps us. In nature and culture a new epoch began with the discovery of fire. But fire can also be responsible for evil effects." The similarities between Lucifer and the Greek legend of Prometheus and his relation to mankind become obvious.

It is essential to note that Lang and von Harbou's portrayal of Death is, as the German title suggests, not a malevolent or sadistic spirit but rather a somber sentinel whose power over the candles' flames enables him to extinguish physical life. Ironically, his dark castle (a metonym for his "kingdom") is illuminated entirely by the flickering omnipresence of tiny flames, three of which whose light in turn he *gives* to the girl as opportunities to save her lover. The otherworldly Death's act of giving the mortal, who has slipped into his realm of the fantastic as if by chance, parallels perfectly the teaching of the twentieth-century esoteric schools regarding the intercessory role of the Aeon Lucifer between mankind and the True God. Like Death in Lang and von Harbou's film, Lucifer betrayed his duties to reserve cosmic wisdom for himself and the celestial hosts when, descending upon primeval humanoids, offered them knowledge of their preexistence in higher realms, which they had forgotten in the course of their time in the material realm.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Steiner made it clear that the Lucifer spirits' decent into matter did not occur once and for all; instead, this process recurred in cycles. Adamantly speaking against the rise of materialist Marxism and the infiltration of tainted ideology from the East, Steiner implicitly shared Heindel's correlation that the Jews, and other Eastern races, were to human species what the Lucifer spirits were to the Angels: stragglers temporarily hindered in the course of evolution, who, because of their materialist sympathies, have turned their hosts to degenerate tendencies. „Und vieles von dem, was dann schon in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts, aber besonders im 19. Jahrhundert als solche Denktechnik sich ausbildete, ist durchsetzt und durchwoven von dem, was in der astralischen Welt, die nun diese rationalistische Welt durchzieht, vorhanden ist. Die irdischen Lüste der Menschen, die raffiniert gedeutet werden sollten, raffiniert erkannt werden sollten durch eine herabgekommene Denktechnik, die entwickeln in den Menschen ein Element, das Nahrung war für gewisse Astralwesenheiten, welche darauf ausgingen, das Denken, das in so hoher Schärfe ausgebildet war, nun bloß zum Durchdringen der irdischen Welt zu verwenden. /Es entstanden solche Theorien wie die marxistischen, die das Denken, statt es zu erheben in das Spirituelle, auf das bloße Verweben sinnlich-physischer Entitäten, sinnlich-physischer- Impulse beschränkten. /Das war etwas, was immer mehr möglich machte, daß gewisse luziferische Wesenheiten, die in dieser Astralsphäre weben, eingreifen konnten in das Denken der Menschen. Das Denken der Menschen wurde ganz und gar durchsetzt von dem, was dann gewisse Astralwesenheiten dachten, von denen nun die westliche Welt ebenso besessen wurde wie die Nachkömmlinge der Schamanen im Osten. /Und so entstanden endlich Gestalten, die besessen waren von solchen Astralwesen, welche in scharfsinnig-irdischem Denken die menschlichen Gelüste eingeführt haben. Und es entstanden solche Wesen wie etwa diejenigen, die dann vom astralischen Plane aus die Lenins und ihre Genossen von sich besessen gemacht haben“ („Die Gnostischen Grundlagen des Vorchristentums,“ in *Drei Perspektiven* 127-128). Not unlike Steiner's penchant to amplify certain inperceptible spiritual struggles in the ethereal realms into the perceptible level the dense material realm, the filmmakers behind Weimar science fiction used race not only to illustrate higher truths but also to ostend to socialpolitical and cultural commonalities with their contemporaries in making analogies with equally real struggles in the spiritual realm.

Death's role the *Der müde Tod*, then, reverses the narrative behind the Temple Legend as much as it reverses audience expectations about death itself. Rather than the nihilistic descent into nonexistence, von Harbou fashioned her character Death to signify the gatekeeper to a renewed and higher state of life, while Lang illustrated this otherwise ominous figure as leading the unexpected way for the lovers plagued by the darkness of death to a state of illuminated reunion. As the Gnostic overtones of Lang and von Harbou's film implies, whereas the Manichean Temple Legend only accounts for the descent of mankind into material existence, the esoteric schools looked to Lucifer as the mythical entity who awakens mankind's consciousness from his amnesic material-mindedness to his transcendental origins in the Pleroma. In other words, as the "bearer of light" Lucifer is the Aeon that instigates the individual's *anamnesis*.<sup>325</sup> For the Gnostics as well as the mystics of the twentieth century, this characterization was no mere metaphor or poetic expression of self-knowledge suddenly coming upon a particular person. The mythic Lucifer represented an entire tier of angelic entities known as "luciferic spirits" who, existing in a demi-god state, have guarded human psyches throughout their collective evolution on earth.

For the proponents in the revival of Gnosticism, the concepts of psychical evolution and reincarnation went hand in hand with physical evolution. Because medieval Western esotericism already reflected this Gnostic teaching, the founding members of Anthroposophy, the O.T.O., and, later, F.S. were quick to reconcile their doctrines of rebirth with Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection and, later, the evolutionary precepts bolstered in supplementary Gnostic literature. Mankind's psychosomatic

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<sup>325</sup> See esp. Heindel, *Cosmo-Conception* 286-287 and his "Lecture XIV: Lucifer: Tempter or Benefactor or Both? – Origin and Mission of Sorrow and Pain," in *Rosicrucian Christianity* 226-241.

development was, they reasoned, not exclusive to ancient heterodox literature; it was scientific, as well as mystical, fact. Defending the dual evolution of body and psyche as a medical doctor in 1893, Franz Hartmann maintained that

A true appreciation and understanding of the essential nature of man will show that the repeated *reincarnation* of the human monad in successive personalities is a scientific necessity. How could it be possible for a man to develop into a state of perfection, if the time of his spiritual growth were restricted to the period of one short existence upon this globe? If he could go on and develop without having a physical body, then why should it have been necessary for him to take a physical body at all?<sup>326</sup>

Bringing age-old concepts under the scrutiny of science, other German-speaking professionals had already drawn this same conclusion in the 1870s and 1880s. The psychologist Carl du Prel concluded that through dream analysis he discovered what he coined “metaphysical Darwinism,” which he explicitly linked human incarnation with Gnostic teachings on the ‘clothing’ of Adam and Eve upon their exile from Eden.<sup>327</sup> Once a confirmed materialist, the zoologist Ernst Haeckel established Monism when he perceived the theories of Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace, and later Aldous Huxley and Herbert Spencer, applied scientifically perfectly to Theosophical teaching.<sup>328</sup> But while physicians and scientists only occasionally alluded to mythological portrayals of this dualistic evolutionary theory, the mystics succeeding them pulled liberally from the

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<sup>326</sup> Franz Hartmann, *Magic White and Black: Or, the Science of Finite and Infinite Life Containing Practical Hints for Students of Occultism* Fourth Edition Revised (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1893/1910): 66.

<sup>327</sup> Though originally propounded in his *Philosophy of Mysticism* (1886), this theory is expressed most succinctly in Carl du Prel “Die Seelenlehre: vom Standpunkt der Geheimwissenschaften, I,” *Der Sphinx: Monatsschrift für die geschichtliche und experimentale Begründung der übersinnlichen Weltanschauung und monistischer Grundlage*, 13 (Apr. 1892): 49-55; and “Die Seelenlehre: vom Standpunkt der Geheimwissenschaften, II,” *Der Sphinx: Monatsschrift für die geschichtliche und experimentale Begründung der übersinnlichen Weltanschauung und monistischer Grundlage*, 13 (May 1892): 216-224. For a discussion of metaphysical Darwinism in the broader context of du Prel’s work, see Andreas Sommer, “From Astronomy to Transcendental Darwinism: Carl du Prel (1839-1899),” *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 23 (2009): 59-68.

<sup>328</sup> Robert J. Richards, *Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Theories of Mind and Behavior* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987): 524-526; Heindel, *Gleanings of a Mystic* (Oceanside, CA: The Rosicrucian Fellowship, 1922): 39-40. See also Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore, MA: John Hopkins University Press, 2004): 111.

mystical luciferic doctrine to supplement the more objective assessments of reincarnation and the quest for self-knowledge. Invariably, this penchant to mythicism led to the figure Lucifer. But perhaps the most notable of these mystics was the Danish-American engineer and adept Rosicrucian Max Heindel.

According to both Heindel and Steiner, the Luciferic spirits are still influential in the psychosomatic evolution of the human species. While they interact with humans on an intimately personal level during the present stage of human evolution—the Aryan (also Post-Atlantean) Epoch—their first influence on humanity signified the end of the Atlantean Epoch. In the primeval past, these spirits constituted a wayward stratum within the hierarchy of angels who, because of their ethereal nature, were unable to incarnate like humans into dense bodies. Since they had so long straggled behind other angels in their involvement in the pleromic realms, the Luciferic spirits realized that they were unable to gain knowledge without the use of an inner organ, a physical brain and spinal cord. Existing halfway between man who had developed a brain and the angels who did not require corporeal organs, these demigods descended upon the human species and, by penetrating its enclosed consciousness that wavered ignorantly between the spiritual and physical planes of existence, inspired the human species to turn its consciousness outside itself into the physical realm.<sup>329</sup> Until this inception, the perception of humanity remained, in the words of Heindel, “like the inner picture-consciousness of our dreams,” one ignorant of the phenomenological world outside the universalistic realm of psychical faculties.

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<sup>329</sup> While Heindel by no means wrote the most extensively among his colleagues, he was perhaps the most persistent in offering concise explanations concerning the Edenic “fall” of man and the role of Lucifer incarnated as the serpent. For this reason, he is cited extensively in this section. See esp. his *Cosmo-Conception* 286-287 and his “Lecture XIV: Lucifer: Tempter or Benefactor or Both? – Origin and Mission of Sorrow and Pain,” in *Rosicrucian Christianity* 226-241. See also Steiner’s See “Lucifer and Christ” in *The Christian Mystery* 115-116.

Pulling from the identical sources as Hartmann, Haeckel, du Prel, and other physicians and scientists advocating the dual evolution of psyche and body, Anthroposophy and Rosicrucianism looked to the Judeo-Christian account of the Garden of Eden to explain this transition since, while not the origins of humanity, certainly marked the genesis of the human species. Whereas mainstream Christianity had come to interpret Lucifer's incarnation as the Serpent and his subsequent temptation of Eve as the downfall of primeval humanity, esoteric doctrine held that this transition marked mankind's evolutionary trend away from asexual reproduction to propagation through complementary genitalia.<sup>330</sup> According to these mystics, this explanation—which they received through clairvoyance, textual analysis, and scientific study—this occurrence backed the Serpent's saying: "Ye shall not surely die, for the God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof *your eyes shall be opened*, and ye shall be as the gods, knowing good and evil."<sup>331</sup> Because the latter was then unknown to man, at this moment Adam and Eve's "eyes were opened" to the physical realm and they realized their "nakedness," i.e., their lack of connection to the physical realm.

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<sup>330</sup> The proponents of Gnosticism at the turn of the century were quite aware of their heterodox ideas. This image of Lucifer, however, seems to have been at the root of Rosicrucian teaching: "The theologian tells us that it is God's decree that we must suffer because our first parents sinned, being tempted by the devil, and then he attempts to justify God by such doggerel as 'In Adam's fall we sinned all.' But why the eating of an apple as a cause should merit the punishment of painful parturition as an effect has always been a sore puzzle to Bible commentators, and how a wise, loving, and just God could decree so much misery to the whole human Race for the apparently slight fault of one pair is sufficiently hard to understand to excuse Robert Ingersoll in a measure for exclaiming: "An honest God is the noblest work of man. /The seeming anomaly arises of course from lack of occult knowledge and consequent materialistic interpretations of that mine of occult information, the Bible" (226-227).

<sup>331</sup> See esp. Heindel, *Rosicrucian Christianity* 233-234: "That the tree of *know-ledge* is a symbolical expression for the generative function is readily apparent when we remember how limited the consciousness of man was at that time. He *knew* or was aware of nothing *outside* himself, his eyes had not yet been opened, his consciousness was internal, like the picture-consciousness of our dreams, except that it was not confused, but he was as unaware of the exterior world and beings as we are now of the spiritual world, save at the times when he was conducted to the temples and brought into intimate sexual contact with another; then, for the moment, the Spirit pierced the veil of flesh. Then man and wife *knew* each other in body, and to the initiated the Bible records these facts in a wonderfully illuminating way and continues to use the same expression in many places, such as: 'Adam *knew* his wife,' and in Mary's question: 'How shall I conceive, seeing that I *know* not a man.' The pain of childbirth is also more logically meted out as a penalty for violation of an injunction against sexual intercourse than as a punishment for eating an apple." Steiner gives an perfectly parallel account of mankind's "picture-consciousness" in his introductory lecture to *The Apocalypse of St. John* 20-21.

For the proponents in the revival of Gnosticism, the so-called “fall” from the mythic Garden of Eden actually signified a gift for humanity, since Lucifer (incarnated as the Serpent) bestowed onto mankind, albeit through his own desire to expand his knowledge by parasitically attaching himself to man’s inner organs, knowledge of the outer world.

According to Heindel:

Having been exiled from the Garden of Eden, the Etheric Region, by learning to *know* the material world, in consequence of repeated sexual abuse which has focused his attention here, this increased use of the desire body hardened the dense body and it began to require food and shelter. Thus man’s ingenuity was taxed to provide for the body. Hunger and cold were whips of evil that called forth man’s ingenuity; they forced him to think and act to provide for his necessities. Thus he is gradually learning wisdom; he provides for these contingencies before they come, because the pangs of hunger and cold have taught him to guard himself, and thus *wisdom is crystallized pain*. Our sorrows, when they are past, and we can calmly view them and extract the lessons they contained, are mines of wisdom, and are the wombs of future joys, for by them we learn to order our lives aright, we learn to cease from sin, for *ignorance* is sin and the only sin, and *applied knowledge is salvation*, and the only salvation.<sup>332</sup>

Reinforcing the Gnostic teaching that applied knowledge *is* salvation and undermining the mainstream Christian doctrine of Original Sin, German-speaking mystics such as Rudolf Steiner, Carl Kellner, and Theodor Reuss saw scientific and epistemological evidence for redeeming the image of Lucifer in the formation their *fin-de-siècle* esoteric schools and, in turn, would inspire the would-be filmmakers of Weimar Germany. Indeed, it is quite literally the applied knowledge of occult powers which marks the symbolic path to salvation for the protagonists in postwar science fiction, enabling them to realize their imperfect surroundings and to resolve their identity crises and sense of alienation.

### *Into the Future*

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<sup>332</sup> Heindel, *Rosicrucian Christianity* 235-236.

The leaders of Anthroposophy, Ordo Templi Orientis, and Fraternitas Saturni likewise viewed the Eden myth as an allegorical account of humanity's evolutionary transition into the present Aryan Epoch, pointing out that this transformation also bespoke a future transition of each individual human, a moment in which a Luciferic spirit would reawaken his cognitive perception to the realms of transcendental reality. In addition, though their contentions differed in their conception of Lucifer's temperament, all agreed that, ultimately, he was, while a dubious spiritual agent, neither tempter nor benefactor for humanity. Instead, he served primarily as a messenger of knowledge whose application was surrendered to mortal discretion. In *Algol*, *Metropolis*, and other fantasy films of Weimar Germany, filmmakers savvy with the Gnostic interpretation of Lucifer incorporated into their screenplays characters based perfectly on the esoteric significance of this allegorical figure. The Weimar screenwriters depicted this luciferic archetype invariably as a swarthy, diminutive human(oid) with wily hair and bulging eyes, and—most significantly—"bearing," whether literally or figuratively, some fantastic manifestation of light, the knowledge of how to use this light, whose power he manipulates to reveal knowledge to characters during the course of these dramas.

Though a more detailed study is needed elucidate these points in their complex Gnostic and occult symbolism, it can easily be asserted that filmmakers of fantasy cinema pulled directly from the esoteric schools' interpretations of Lucifer.<sup>333</sup> Filmmakers including Albin Grau, Thea von Harbou, Fritz Lang, and F.W. Murnau imbued the plot

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<sup>333</sup> Similar to Heindel and Steiner's penchant to analyze ancient Gnostic mythologies, members of the other newly formed esoteric schools and secret societies shared his fascination in deciphering esoteric wisdom not only from Christian texts but from Europe's semi-mythical histories and pagan lore as well. While in none of these sources do Heindel, Reuss, or Steiner credit the many German-speaking philologists, historians, and other scholars who were contemporaneously engaged in studying comparative religions and astral myths, it is impossible to presume they were ignorant of these sources after reading their complex astrological, alchemical, and Gnostic interpretations of these ancient and medieval mythologies (as well as their modernized plays and novels).

and visuals of premodern-based fantasies including *Der müde Tod*, *Das indische Grabmal* (The Indian Tomb, 1921), *Schatten: Eine Nächtliche Halluziation* (Warning Shadows, 1923) (Fig. 3.9), *Die Nibelungen* (1924) (Fig. 3.10) and *Faust* (1926) (Fig. 3.11) with luciferic symbolism faithfully compatible with the esoteric interpretations of mystics like Max Heindel, Theodor Reuss, and Rudolf Steiner, who indicated that encoded tales toward self-knowledge were preserved in Europe's oldest myths in their lectures and treatises. For them as for the ancient Gnostics, the power of myth gave expression to a truth that, not accessible by intellectual logic in the ordinary sense, could only be conveyed to the incarnated psyche through allusion and symbol.<sup>334</sup>

Maintaining that indeed the general public, and indeed most critics, remained ignorant of the true significance behind great Germanic epics like *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, *Faust*, *Tannhäuser*, *Parsifal*, and *Lohengrin*, these mystics praised novelists including Johan Wolfgang von Goethe and Ludwig Tieck, and even composers like Richard Wagner, for faithfully preserving the hidden kernels of mystical wisdom in what appeared to most individuals the histrionic fantasies of Romantic literature and opera.<sup>335</sup> Identification with these medieval myths was in no way backward or antimodern.

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<sup>334</sup> See e.g. Hartmann, *Magic: Black and White* 27-29; and Reuss 73.

<sup>335</sup> Hartmann commented extensively on the interpretation of myths in *Magic: Black and White*: "Very stupid indeed and insignificant would be the stories contained in Bible, and in other religious books, if the personal events described therein were referring merely to certain occurrences having happened in the lives of certain individuals who lived some thousand of years ago, and whose biography can seriously interest no one today. /But fortunately for the Bible and—if we only new how to read it—fortunately for us, the stories contained therein are by no means merely histories of persons who lived in ancient times, but they are allegories and myths having very often a very deep meaning, of which our expounders of the Bible, as well as its critics, usually know very little" (27-28). See also Steiner's discussion of spiritual science's relation to religious myth in an introductory lecture given at Nuremberg on 17 June 1908 in J. Collis, trans. *The Apocalypse of St. John: Lectures on the Book of Revelation; A Cycle of Twelve Lectures with One Introductory Lecture given at Nuremberg from 17 to 30 June 1908* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1977): 9-18. Heindel, *Mysteries of the Great Operas: Faust, Parsifal, The Ring of the Nibelungs, Tannhäuser, Lohengrin* (London: L.N. Fowler & Co., 1921). In the O.T.O., for example, Reuss was profoundly intrigued with the legend of Parsifal, which, so he claimed, symbolized in its drama of the Holy Grail an allegorical account of all the secrets of sex magic maintained by the Gnostic-Christians. Enamored by Wagner's rendition of this medieval myth, Reuss adapted the opera's drama into the initiation ceremonies for the O.T.O. See esp. "Parsifal und das Enthüllte Grals-Geheimnis" in Reuss 56-77. Steiner's lectures abound with his endeavor to sift occult subtexts from ancient, medieval, and Romanticist stories and epics.

Instead, they viewed the Cathars of France, the Bogemils of Southeastern Europe, the Druids of Ireland and the Trottos of Northern Russia as the prototypes to their own “esoteric schools.” Referring to the term “Dark Ages,” Heindel admitted:

[D]ark though they were, the spiritual impulse spread, and from the standpoint of the occult scientist they were “Bright Ages” compared to the growing materialism of the last 300 years, which has increased physical knowledge immensely, but has almost extinguished the Light of the Spirit./ Tales of “The Grail,” “Knights of The Round Table,” etc., are now scouted as superstitions and all that cannot be materially demonstrated is regarded as unworthy of belief. Glorious as are the discoveries of modern science, they have been bought at the terrible price of crushing the spiritual intuition and, from a spiritual standpoint, no darker day than the present has ever dawned.<sup>336</sup>

By consciously devising their plots and visuals with such symbolism, then, these filmmakers were continuing an aesthetic tradition that conveyed occult knowledge through a carefully preserved and evolving tradition of signs and symbols. Indeed, the salvation of the characters in Weimar science fiction comes when they realize how to discover, master, and transfuse themselves with the occult power behind seemingly materialist science and technology.

Because they gave this arcane symbolism, including the Gnostic Lucifer, renewed expression through staged choreography and technical effects, these filmmakers were able to enchant postwar moderns in reinvigorated form. Significantly, however, the aeonic Lucifer was a particularly favored metonym for the revival of Gnosticism and the rise of occult sciences in *fin-de-siècle* and postwar Europe. From 1903 to 1908, for example, Rudolf Steiner was the editor of *Lucifer-Gnosis*, a periodical reserved for scientific, medical, and philosophical topics dealing with arcane topics. Although at present no information has been found regarding the O.T.O.’s official position on this

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<sup>336</sup> Heindel, *Cosmo-Conception* 409.

figure, there is little doubt that Reuss's scientific-philosophical interpretations of the alchemical symbolism behind “Gnostic Neo-Christianity” influenced Albin Grau's teaching in the Pansophical Lodge in 1921—and later in Fraternitas Saturni—that Lucifer stands as the savior of mankind.<sup>337</sup>

In addition to the teachings of Rosicrucianism, these interpretations had been foreshadowed in the teachings of the Theosophical Society. In the opening article of her international journal *Lucifer*, Madam Blavatsky made clear that the theosophical understanding of Lucifer was as displaced from mainstream Judeo-Christian doctrine as it was from its supposed anti-scientific, premodern worldview:

By choosing it [“Lucifer”], we throw the first ray of light and truth on a ridiculous prejudice which ought to have no room made for it in this our “age of facts and discovery.” We work for true Religion and Science, in the interest of fact as against fiction and prejudice. It is our duty, as it is that of physical Science—professedly its mission—to throw light on facts in Nature hitherto surrounded by the darkness of ignorance. And since ignorance is justly regarded as the chief promoter of superstition, that work is, therefore, a noble and beneficent work. But natural Sciences are only one aspect of SCIENCE and TRUTH. Psychological and moral Sciences, or theosophy, the knowledge of divine truth, wheresoever found, are still more important in human affairs [...].<sup>338</sup>

According to Theosophy, Rosicrucianism, Ordo Templi Orientis, Anthroposophy, and later esoteric schools and occult societies, “Lucifer” signified scientific *as well as* spiritual illumination, the inspiration to social reform, and the extinguishing of superstition and materialist ignorance. Though always opposed and slandered by the religious establishment, the light bringers could, they held, stimulate independent thinking, egalitarianism, and a profound awareness of brotherhood.

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<sup>337</sup> For a detailed summary of the F.S. teaching on Lucifer under Grau, see Flowers 17-20. Perhaps not surprisingly, the teachings of the Pansophical Lodge and F.S. on Lucifer are reflected in Grau's *Schatten*. These filmic interpretations are exceedingly faithful to the general Gnostic conception of Lucifer as the “light bringer” for humanity.

<sup>338</sup> Helena Petrovna Blavatsky in “What's in a Name? Why the Magazine is called ‘Lucifer’,” *Lucifer: A Theosophical Magazine Designed to “Bring to Light the Hidden Things of Darkness”* 1 (September 1887): 6.

At the same time, however, their psychical influence over man could also persuade him to use this knowledge to more malevolent endeavors. When constructing his “Goetheanum” in Dornach during the latter days of the Great War, Steiner sculpted a giant statue dominated by Christ and Lucifer. According to Steiner, their depictions emphasized that while Christ represents the true corporeal faculty within man to access higher spiritual powers, the light Aeon Lucifer, while stimulating creativity and spirituality, plays on human pride and offers the delusions of divinity.<sup>339</sup> Similarly Heindel emphasized that in esoteric Christianity was Lucifer represents a straggling, or degenerate, class of angels reluctant to evolve to higher states of consciousness. The occult interpretation of evolution, he indicated, supported this understanding of Lucifer in its understanding of organic evolution:

It will be noted that the modern evolutionary theory, particularly that of Haeckel, would, if it were completely reversed, be in almost perfect accord with the knowledge of occult science. The monkey has degenerated from the man. The polyps are the last degeneration left behind by the mammals. The mosses are the lowest degenerations of the plant kingdom. The mineral kingdom is the final goal of all the kingdoms when they have reached the acme of degeneration. [...] The mineralogist will learnedly explain that [a rock] is composed of hornblende, feldspar and mica, but the trained clairvoyant, who can trace it back in the memory of Nature, through millions of years, can supplement that statement by adding: Yes, and that which you call hornblende and feldspar are the leaves and stems of prehistoric flowers, and the mica is all that remains of their petals.<sup>340</sup>

In both Rosicrucianism and Anthroposophy, then, Lucifer is the angelic equivalent to various plant, animal, and even human races that have “involved,” or fallen behind in the

<sup>339</sup> In Anthroposophical teachings, Steiner was able to offset the more malignant qualities of Lucifer by projecting them onto Ahriman, a figure from Persian mythology whom Steiner considered the aeonic counterpart to Lucifer. In contrast to Lucifer, whom he associated with Eastern spirituality, Ahriman tempts human beings to deny their link with divinity and to live entirely in the material plane, but he also stimulates intellectuality and technology. In spite of Steiner’s fission of these ‘light spirits’ into brighter and darker representatives, Ahriman’s association with knowledge is obviously akin to Theosophy and Rosicrucianism’s perspectives on Lucifer. For description of this statue, see Steiner, Peter Mollenhauer, trans. *Christ in Relation to Lucifer and Ahriman: Lecture given in Linz on May 18, 1915* (Spring Valley, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1978): 1-4.

<sup>340</sup> Heindel, *Cosmo-Conception* 343-344.

evolutionary tract.<sup>341</sup> While of a higher consciousness than mankind, then, Lucifer represents the Promethean initiator whose knowledge directs man's spiritual longing to the superior knowledge of Christ, the destiny of proper human evolution during the Aryan stage in development. (This Christ Aeon will be discussed at length in the next chapter.) Even in *Fraternitas Saturni*, where Lucifer is deemed a savior of mankind, the Aeon only anticipates the coming of the Christos, or Christ figure.<sup>342</sup> Whether portrayed as tempter or benefactor, German-speaking mystics of the early twentieth century viewed Lucifer as an overall dubious yet marvelous messenger.<sup>343</sup>

In the same way, if Weimar's filmic mythology could transcribe Gnostic wisdom into allegorical portrayals of premodern European life, then it could also transliterate these heterodox teachings into postwar dream-images of artificial intelligences, high-tech laboratory experiments, and futuristic dystopias. Their inclusion of the luciferic Aeon as a symbol of the mysterious workings of science and technology is no exception. Through visuals and intertitles, these filmmakers that their main protagonists become compelled to transform themselves—to push themselves 'forward,' as it were—in flashing moments of quasi-mystical insight induced by luciferic entities. In their script for *Algol*, Hans Brennert and Fridel Köhne intended the alien figure Algol as a representation of Algol, who bestows onto Robert the fantastic power of the Algol machine. As a symbolic expression of the Gnostic Aeon Lucifer, Algol discloses his secret knowledge only to

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<sup>341</sup> See esp. Steiner's lecture "Evolution and Involution as They are Interpreted by Occult Societies (The Atom as Congealed Electricity)," delivered in Berlin on 23 December 1904, in *Temple Legend*, 116-127; and Heindel's comments on the future of mankind in "Jesus and Christ-Jesus" in *Cosmo-Conception* 374-383. Heindel makes it clear that the luciferic spirits enabled "the activities of man – or the Life-force which has become man," which was formerly directed inward, to find outward expression and application. This is "the very same force which he [man] now sends out from himself to build railways, steamboats, etc., [which] was used internally in building a vehicle through which to manifest himself" (*ibid.* 337).

<sup>342</sup> Flowers 33-35.

<sup>343</sup> See e.g. Steiner's commentary on the Luciferic spirits in "Lucifer and Christ" in *The Christian Mystery*, esp. 115-116.

Robert, transporting himself on the rays of the variable star between the Earth and his home planet. The way in which Werckmeister visually portrayed his ethereal transport into a realm beyond the reach of man and into the farthest reaches of outer space is highly faithful to the intervention of Luciferic spirits between the celestial Pleroma and material existence.

In her novel for *Metropolis*, von Harbou depicted the scientist-alchemist C.A. Rotwang in terms perfectly aligned with Lucifer. Alluding to the Gnostic understanding of luciferic spirits as the light bringers to humanity, in both her screenplay and novel she cleverly described Rotwang as a reclusive “inventor” (*Erfinder*) who is responsible for the “electric marvels of the city.”<sup>344</sup> This portrayal is all the more ironic since, as her novel makes clear, the Joh Fredersen, the Master of Metropolis, is a confirmed materialist driven by his greedy self-interest and will to create an antireligious utopian civilization. In spite of Joh’s convictions, however, Rotwang has proven invaluable to the Master of Metropolis. In both the book and the screenplay, Joh admits that Rotwang possesses knowledge which no one else in his city can provide him: “I need your advice – as usual, when all my experts have failed me.”<sup>345</sup>

In the course of her novel and screenplay, von Harbou gradually unfolded a storyline in which this alleged “Master of Metropolis” is in fact—as Freder initially discovers during his traumatic encounter in the Machine Halls—not in control of his great city. While in his visuals Lang was highly faithful in depicting on the film set von Harbou’s

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<sup>344</sup> In the English-language brochure for the film’s London premier, the anonymous writer described Rotwang as “the great scientist and inventor, who has created the electric marvels of the city, and who is absorbed in the task of perfecting an Automaton.” See Anonymous, ed. “Metropolis: Premier Presentation at Marble Arch Pavilion, Monday, March 21. Special Edition” (UFA/Wardour Films Limited, 1927). No page numbers.

<sup>345</sup> Cited from von Harbou’s screenplay: „Ich brauche Deinen Rat – wie stets, wenn alle meine Sachverständigen versagen...“

literary description of Rotwang and his medieval-style abode, her backstory of Rotwang's house reveals that the inventor's power source is far more ancient, and arcane, than anything in Metropolis, even the Gothic cathedral, whose pious architecture Joh has long sought in vain to demolish through legal means.<sup>346</sup> The novel's description is worth quoting at length:

It was said that a magician, who came from the East – in the track of whose red shoes the plague wandered – had built the house in seven nights. But the masons and carpenters of the city did not know who had mortared the bricks or who had erected the roof. Neither foreman's speech nor ribboned nosegay had hallowed the Builder's Feast according to the pious custom. The chronicles of the city held no record of when the magician died or of how he died. One day it perplexed the citizens that the red shoes of the magician had so long shunned the abominable pavements of the city. Entrance was forced into the house and not a living soul was found inside. But the rooms, which received neither by day nor by night a ray from the great lights of the sky, seemed to be sunken in a deep sleep, waiting for their master. Parchments and folios lay about, open, under a covering of dust, like silver-grey velvet.

Set in all the doors stood, copper-red, mysterious, the seal of Solomon, the pentagram. / [...]

One day there came to the city a man from far away, who saw the house and said: "I want to have that."

He was initiated into the story of the house. He did not smirk. He insisted on his purpose. He bought the house at a very low price, moved in at once, and kept it unaltered.

This man was called Rotwang. Few knew him. Only Joh Fredersen knew him very well. He found it easier to fight out the quarrel about the cathedral with the sect of Gothic monks than with Rotwang about the magician's house.<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> Von Harbou, *Metropolis* 57, 58-59.

<sup>347</sup> Original: „Es hießt, ein Magier, der aus dem Morgenlande gekommen war – (in den Spuren seine roten Schuhe wanderte die Pest) –, habe das Haus in sieben Nächten gebaut. Aber die Mauer und die Zimmerleute der Stadt wußten nicht, wer die Steine gemörtelt hat oder das Dach errichtet hatte. Kein Meisterspruch und kein gebänderter Strauß hatten nach frommem Brauch das Richtfest geheiligt. Die Chronik der Stadt berichtete nichts davon, wann der Magier gestorben war und wie er starb. Eines Tages fiel es den Bürgern befremdlich auf, daß die roten Schuhe des Magiers so lange schon das abscheuliche Pflaster der Stadt gemieden hatten. Man drang in das Haus und fand keine lebende Seele darin. Doch scheinen die Räume, die weder bei Tag noch bei Nacht von den großen Lichtern des Himmels ein Strahlen empfingen, in Schlaf versenkt auf ihren Meister zu warten. Pergamente und Folianten lagen aufgeschlagen, mit Staub bedeckt wie mit silbergrauem Stammet. /In alle Türen eingedrückt stand kupferrot, geheimnisvoll, das Siegel Solomonis, das Pentagramm. / [...] /Da kam eines Tages ein Mann fernher der Stadt, der sah das Haus und sagte: „Das will ich haben.“ /Man weihte ihn in der Geschichte des Hauses ein. Er lächelte nicht. Er bestand auf

Buried in the shadows of the high skyscrapers and monorails—which, ironically, the inventor's own knowledge has made possible—Lang and von Harbou intended Rotwang's house (and by extension, the cathedral)<sup>348</sup> as a metonym for the irrepressible presence of the occult even in an ultramodern, consumerist urban giant like Metropolis. Yet Rotwang's house, while seemingly medieval, doubles as his laboratory. Lang was again faithful to von Harbou's novel by depicting its interior with strange coils of electric lights, mysteriously opening doors, tangled wires along musty bookshelves, and a giant furnace next to glass tubes with boiling chemicals. Here science and the occult are inextricably intertwined with one another (Fig. 3.12).

Indeed, Rotwang has “invented” nothing new. Instead, he has only brought into the modern West an occult force lost in the wisdom of the Orient. His presence, though not identified until later in the drama, is implicit in the technology of Metropolis, whose power serves as an extension of his own arcane knowledge. Analogous to the serpent’s wisdom embodied in the forbidden fruit in Genesis, his machinery is the reason that Maria—the representation of Eve, which the Gnostics held was the first incarnation of the Virgin Mary and also the savioress, not temptress, of her husband Adam, the first incarnation of Jesus, for awakening him to the knowledge of good and evil<sup>349</sup>—appears to

seinem Vorsatz. Er kaufte das Haus um sehr geringen Preis, bezog es sogleich und ließ es unverändert. /Der Mann hieß Rotwang. Wenige kannten ihn. Nur Joh Fredersen kannte den Mann sehr gut. Er hatte sich leichter entschlossen, den Kampf um dem Dom mit der Sekte der Gotiker auszufechten, als mit Rotwang den Kampf um das Haus des Magiers.“ Cited from von Harbou, *Metropolis* 57-58.

<sup>348</sup> During the climax of her novel, von Harbou featured a showdown between the robot, represented as the Whore of Babylon, and the reveling upperclassmen with the “Gothic sect” of monks and religious fanatics from the cathedral who, flagellating themselves, march against one another as evil spirits and strange creatures erupt from the cathedral walls; see esp. *Metropolis* 188-189, 246-249. In his interview with Bogdanovich, Lang affirmed that this material almost found its way into the film version: “The magician [Rotwang] was the evil behind all the things that happened: in one scene all the bridges were falling down, there were flames, and out of a Gothic church came all these ghosts and ghouls and beasties. I said, ‘No, I cannot do this.’ Today I would do it, but in those days I didn’t have the courage.” Peter Bogdanovich, *Who the Devil Made It: Conversations with Legendary Film Directors* (New York, NY: Ballantine Publishing, 1997): 178-179.

<sup>349</sup> See Cobb 152: “When the Soul, figured as Eve, listens to the seductions of sense, i.e., of Life as seeking to act apart of the Whole, she becomes from generate to degenerate and must become regenerate, i.e., she must become purified,

Freder in the Eternal Gardens for him to discover, albeit to his shock, the truth beyond the plastic reality in which he has been placed. For good or evil, then, Rotwang symbolizes the all-wise serpent of Gnostic tradition.<sup>350</sup>

As if to underscore this irony, von Harbou's storyline makes clear that while Joh Fredersen certainly designs, orchestrates, and executes the business of his city, he remains nonetheless dependent on Rotwang's occult knowledge, whose divinatory powers, though highly effective, he persists in denying. Thus in her novel and screenplay for *Metropolis*, von Harbou set Joh Fredersen in the same relation to Rotwang as Hans Brennert and Fridel Köhne set Robert Herne in relation to Algol. Among their similarities, both the architects of these industrial dynasties secretly rely on a wielder of occult power, a Gnostic "light bringer," whose magical technology, brought by this luciferic creature from a distant realm evocative of the Pleroma, has proven itself a scientifically reality in its ability to harness uncannily efficient power as well as to astonish, intrigue, and enchant scientists and laity alike.<sup>351</sup>

or single-pointed, and then perfect her purification by giving birth to the Christ through the Spirit who is her true husband. Eve must become Mary, and her Son the St. George crushing the serpent's head. The Soul is first the daughter, then the spouse, and finally the Mother of God." Elucidation on this point will come in the next chapter, but in *Metropolis* Freder's love for Maria shows to a longing for his dead mother, Hel. Because at this point in the narrative Freder is figured as "the son," the context must read him (as many scholars have) as Christ about to begin his ministry. By the end of von Harbou's plot, Freder does reunite with Maria and crush Rotwang's (i.e., Lucifer's, the Gnostic equivalent of Satan) head. See also discussion of Virgin Mary in relation to Jesus in Cobb 226-227.

<sup>350</sup> In *Algol*, Maria Obal's son, Peter Hell, experiences a situation almost identical to Freder. After Robert and Maria part ways in the drama, Maria has a son who, the same age as Robert's Reginald, works each day in the Bios-Works. One day, he is violently electrocuted by the Algol-rays that course through the machine (see Fig. 3.13). Peter is immediately taken up by fellow workers on a stretcher as the face of Algol grimaces from behind the machine, having caused the accident himself. Not only was the entire scene almost perfectly copied in von Harbou's script (and Lang's visuals) for *Metropolis*, it also eludes to the *anamnesis* of Peter, who, recovering from his shock, sets out on a mission to demand that Robert Herne give the power behind the Algol machines to the people. Deeper than a narrative about class antagonisms, this scene and its context reflect the same esoteric subtext as found in *Metropolis*: Freder's sudden vision compels him to liberate what Maria has just revealed to him as his "brothers." In both cases, the occult technology 'awakens' the hero in his mission. Algol, then, represents the luciferic serpent that conveys sacred knowledge to humanity. (See above citation.)

<sup>351</sup> Lang claimed to have conceived the storyline for *Metropolis* in October 1924, when UFA Studios had sent him and Eric Pommer to the United States to study American filmmaking methods. His description of New York City evokes the way which he visually portrayed the magical technology in his film: "I roamed the streets all day. The buildings struck me as a vertical curtain, glistening and very light, an opulent stage backdrop hung against a gloomy sky to

In their screenplay for *Algol*, Brennert and Köhne portrayed their protagonist as having a materialist worldview very similar to von Harbou's portrayal of Joh Fredersen five years later in her novel. As their story of the mighty technocrat progresses, Robert's increasingly staunch rejection of the "eternal force" underpinning his rule only estranges his relationship to the suspicious being Algol. Bent liberating the workers of his home country through his power-saving Bios-Works, his altruistic mission becomes clouded by the greedy notion that no one may know that his company's generators rely on the light emissions from the variable star. Hiding Algol's ancient tomes and the prototype machine in a secret compartment of his mansion, the engineer claims to have made his discovery by his rational intellect alone, eventually succumbing to hubristic behavior, and then delusions of grandeur. Though Robert does not physically encounter the alien creature again, its presence (represented through visual tricks) haunts the mortal by descending upon the Earth during each waxing phase of variable star, polluting the skies through factory smog, provoking workers' riots, electrocuting factory hands (Fig. 13), and even inciting Robert's son, Reginald, in a coup against his increasingly paranoid father.

In her storyline for *Metropolis*, von Harbou envisioned a similar sort of characterological change in Joh Fredersen. Not only does Joh access Rotwang's occult power source generate the city's machines; in the course of the novel, it is revealed that Joh has commissioned Rotwang to invent a race of automata which, powered by this same mysterious electricity, should replace the workers in the Machine Halls and thus

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dazzle, to distract, and to hypnotize."<sup>10</sup> Scholars have indicated that Lang's story was a fabrication, since von Harbou had started almost three months before his trip on her novel for *Metropolis*, but his mixture of fear and fascination—so representative of the Weimar ambivalence toward American culture—anticipates the alleged occult power behind technology that *Metropolis* brings to the forefront with the Lucifer overtones in the character Rotwang. Lang's quote cited in Klaus Kreimeier; Robert and Rita Kimber, trans. *The Ufa Story: A History of Germany's Greatest Film Company, 1918-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999): 153.

render manual labor in Metropolis obsolete.<sup>352</sup> This plan is less explicit in Lang's film, but in both versions of von Harbou's story indeed there appears the automaton prototype—"Maschinenmensch" (Machine-Man) in the film and "Futura" in the novel. In addition to once again undermining Fredersen's control over his city, von Harbou made it clear that this materialist's arrogant denial of the potency of occult forces leads directly to his city's calamitous upheaval by the vehement machines themselves—most notably the Machine-Man, which, once Rotwang 'programs' it, entralls both the engineers and the workers, leading them respectively to overindulgent debauchery and riotous anger. Freder's clairvoyant revelation of the M-Machine as the vengeful Amorite god Moloch, then, proves nothing less than prophetic, a symbolic destruction of the children of Metropolis, which in Greek translates "mother city."

Whereas in Brennert and Köhne's script Robert's own selfishness leads to the titular "tragedy of power," thus undermining the fatalism associated with the astrological overtones of the plot, in *Metropolis* von Harbou heightened this irony by pitting the materialist Fredersen's reluctant reliance on alchemical wisdom. Secretly meting out for their counterparts their occult power from long-gone occult adepts, Algol and Rotwang share a great deal in common both visually and textually. Visually, Werckmeister and Lang associated these conjuring avatars with an inverted pentagram (in *Algol*, in the old manuscript from Dr. Crane; in *Metropolis*, on the doors and in the laboratory of the magician's house) and, related to this point, with overt Semitic attributes.<sup>353</sup> In other words, both these capitalistic, man-eating societies rest on the magical powers of a

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<sup>352</sup> Von Harbou, *Metropolis* 65-66.

<sup>353</sup> Much scholarship has addressed the Semitic stereotypes that abound in these and other fantasy films in Weimar Germany. See e.g. William Collins Donahue's discussion of Rotwang in "The Shadow Play of Religion in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*," *New England Review* 24 (2003): 214-216.

Semitic caricature. While the alchemical significance of the inverted pentagram (and hexagram) will be discussed in the Fifth Chapter, the peculiar phenotype that Lang and Werckmeister chose for the antagonists in their cinematic features is worth discussing since, besides its obvious racialist implications, this aesthetic portrayal was also used on the other “Lucifer” characters in Weimar cinema.

Further research is required to draw definitive conclusions for the precise reasons behind such depictions, but it can be asserted that the “light bringers” in *Algol* and *Metropolis* are not only responsible for the technology but also the rampant consumerism and cosmopolitan debauchery—the latter of which is always associated with the Orient—that unfold as futuristic fruits of their ruthlessly capitalistic civilizations. Considering the exotica, subversion, and agitation associated with orientalism in the early twentieth century, it is no coincidence that the creators of Weimar cinema often depicted the antagonists of their screenplays, whether explicitly or implicitly, as possessing knowledge from the Orient. More than an expression of the characters’ racial otherness (both Algol and Rotwang appear as foreigners in both Werckmeister and Lang’s films), the modernist angst of globalization, or even the alluring mystique of far-flung cultures, the dynamic of this motif plays out as the representation of occult knowledge itself coming up from the Orient and penetrating the realm of Western civilization.

While German-speaking mystics during the *fin de siècle* treated the Aeon Lucifer as an ultimately dubious figure, in the material for their films, Brennert, Köhne, Lang, von Harbou, and Werckmeister undeniably envisioned their luciferic characters as filmic antagonists. By the end of both films and von Harbou’s book, Algol and Rotwang prove not only deceitful in their pact with the enterprising industrialists, both also prey upon the

leading lady whose name in both cases is “Maria.” In *Algol*, the alien being persists in his licentious advances to Maria Obal upon his reappearance in the coalmines. The young woman renounces the being, of whose supernatural powers she remains ignorant, as a “devil” (*Teufel*). Frightening away the woman with his grimace, Algol retorts: “Devil?! Yes, from now on that’s what I’ll be!”<sup>354</sup> In *Metropolis*, Rotwang agrees with Fredersen to kidnap the proletarian Maria in order to replicate her image onto the robot, which the architect hopes will disillusion the workers. When the inventor creeps after the prophetess in the catacombs, Lang’s visuals in the ensuing chase scene cannot be discussed at length without an ostensive comparison to rape (Fig. 3.14).<sup>355</sup> In both instances, these subterranean encounters mark a turning point in the audience perception of the antagonists, who afterward show themselves hostile to Robert and Freder’s saviorist missions to free the captive workers.

In both Werckmeister and Lang’s films, the pinnacle of ultramodern hedonism is represented in the extravagant nightclubs and wild parties that transpire as the emblematic spoils of scientific achievement and technological might. In both cases, these spaces are depicted with strong oriental overtones. In *Algol*, the spoiled Reginald frequents a lavish hotel<sup>356</sup> where he cavorts with a certain Yella Ward (Erna Morena), whose dark complexion and sparkling clothing contrast sharply with the pale, traditionally dressed natives of the industrial city. As the couple saunters through the dance hall, weakening to her suggestions to betray his father, a diminutive violinist lurks

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<sup>354</sup> Original: „Teufel?! Ja, das will ich von nun an sein!“

<sup>355</sup> Numerous scholars have noted Rotwang’s symbolic rape of Maria in the catacombs, including Thomas Elsaesser, *Metropolis* (London, England: British Film Institute, 2000): 41; and Andreas Huyssen, “The Vamp and the Machine: Technology and Sexuality in Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*,” *New German Critique* (Autumn 1981): 230.

<sup>356</sup> At one point in the drama, a handwritten letter mentions the name of this hotel; however, the existing copy of the film used for this study contained a poorly edited frame, leaving the hotel name off screen. Another copy of the film, then, must be found for this information.

directly behind Reginald. Without a doubt, the player is Algol. Suddenly, an intertitle notes that the great room's ambience exudes "strangely compelling ways" (*Seltsam zwingende Weisen*)—wordplay alluding simultaneously to the woman's charming "manner" and the violinist's equally beguiling "tune," both which lure Reginald away from his real-world responsibilities as Robert's successor. Like the African servants and Chinese furniture in his bedroom at his father's mansion,<sup>357</sup> Reginald's tastes prove fatal as Yella seduces him into usurping his father's power in order to gain control of the Bios-Works as his wife. When Reginald finally triumphs in his coup, Yella hosts a frenzied celebration complete with oriental decorations and exotic dancers, including the actual celebrity Sebastian Droste (Fig. 3.15), who hail Reginald for his heartless overthrow of his father.

In *Metropolis*, each night the city's elites carouse at Yoshiwara, a red-light district which, named after the infamous pleasure district in nineteenth-century Tokyo, proffers the wealthy any sensual pleasure they desire. In her novel, von Harbou went to great lengths explaining how Metropolis' high-tech den of vices was fashioned after the hedonism of the East, and how its signature narcotic, "*Maohee*," plunges its patrons into phantasmagorias of animalistic lust. Complementing this description, through his visuals Lang demonstrated how Yoshiwara's appeal to hedonistic consumerism, multiracialism, and licentiousness lures otherwise innocent young men of Metropolis to succumb to the temptations of the city and the night. While Freder (in both von Harbou's novel and screenplay) is not lured into Yoshiwara in the same fashion as the wayward Reginald in

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<sup>357</sup> Reginald's taste for all things exotic (particularly oriental) are glaringly obvious in this film, especially since no other member in his family holds this mutual fascination. In the course of the plot, Reginald withdraws from his father almost entirely to watch his African dancer in his room, whose layout evokes images of an opium den.

*Algol*,<sup>358</sup> his dearest friends become unable to resist the wiles of the Machine-Man, which, given the image of the motherly-virginal Maria, incites men, lured to her treachery and seductiveness in the red-light district, to become mad, angry, and aggressive toward each other, and to eventually spill out into the streets of Metropolis in a sybaritic orgy (Fig. 3.16).

In both Werckmeister and Lang's films, the respective masterminds behind the oriental exotica that distracts men from reality are the occult adepts Algol and Rotwang. Not only are they the technological progenitors who have brought occult-inspired technology to Western civilization, they have also brought with them the degenerate plague of modernist narcissism—one worse than the Black Death for which medieval Europeans had so long accused Jews. Amassing for their hosts unprecedented amounts of wealth and leisure time, these parasitic “light bringers” possess the ability to manipulate markets, invent miracle-working technology, and enthrall crowds by exhibiting their advanced scientific knowledge.<sup>359</sup> But these magical skills can prove correspondingly destructive. These cinematic characters, then, were subtly engineered to resemble the popular twentieth-century mystical conception of the Gnostic Aeon Lucifer, who, teaching man and woman they could become as gods, opened humanity’s eyes to the gift of freewill. As embodiments of this motif, Algol and Rotwang elicit for the main characters a resurgence of repressed memory, trauma, and sexual desire—all which are

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<sup>358</sup> In her novel and screenplay, von Harbou suggested Freder's figurative betrayal of his responsibilities when he “switches lives” („Höre mich an.... Ich will mein Leben mit Dir tauschen...“) with one of the workers in the Machine Halls. When this worker, named Georgi (Worker “11811”), trades clothes with Freder and ascends *in cognito* into the upper levels of Metropolis, Fredersen's spies who has been pursuing Freder mistakes Georgi for the young engineer. Like Reginald who is lured into the oriental vices in *Algol*, Georgi finds money in Freder's pockets and, instead of going directly to the destination Freder has ordered, goes instead to Yoshiwara. As will be discussed in the Sixth Chapter, Freder's figurative betrayal has esoteric significance.

<sup>359</sup> In these films, the same contradictory stereotypes about Jews—viz., that they are the locus of both cosmopolitan ultra-rational capitalism and pre-Enlightenment occult practices—are also associated with technology and science in *Algol* and *Metropolis*. This is also the case, at least implicitly, in *Schatten* and *Nosferatu*.

considered either primitive or socially unacceptable for the Westerners in the drama, but also which, if mastered, can lead humanity to the ultimate salvation of absolute self-knowledge.

As regards the narratives and the esoteric symbolism behind *Algol* and *Metropolis*, these continuous cross-references to the Gnostic Lucifer and seemingly anti-Semitic portrayals of these villains deserves further investigation. Indeed, if a scholar was not aware of Gnostic mythologies or the Gnostic revival during early twentieth century in Europe, then one may be tempted to suggest that—in addition to basic biblical themes—Thea von Harbou drew her inspiration directly from Hans Brennert and Fridel Köhne’s screenplay for *Algol*. Even many of Lang’s shots seem directly taken from those filmed by Werckmeister almost seven years prior to *Metropolis*. But while Werckmeister’s film can be considered more original in this respect, it is obvious to anyone acquainted with Gnosticism and the German-speaking mystics from the *fin de siècle* the historical context that both sets of filmmakers were pulling from a common source for their narrative, one that found its impetus in viewing science and technology in radically numinous and altogether mystical way. As the next two chapters will elucidate, many of the two films’ narrative parallels discussed above point to complex Gnostic and esoteric symbolism involving the interaction of allegorical archetypes besides the Aeon Lucifer.

This broader scope, however, should not undermine the recurring importance of the luciferic characters who seem so ubiquitous in German Expressionist cinema during the Weimar Republic. As mentioned above, Algol and Rotwang share definitive luciferic characteristics and attributes found in films by F.W. Murnau, Albin Grau, and other filmmakers who were steeped in Gnosticism, occultism, and the ancient Orient.

Faithfully following the Gnostic interpretation of the Aeon Lucifer, these filmmakers depicted their luciferic characters with similar physical features and licentious, parasitic, unpredictable, and often saturnine behavior. Though not always antagonists, these figures remain ambiguous avatars of otherworldly knowledge which, represented through light, the main characters must choose to use towards good or evil purposes in transcending the bounds of the normative.

It is highly unlikely that these luciferic caricatures are mere crude products of cinematic racism. While contemporary filmmakers outside Germany certainly caricatured their own antagonists with stereotypically Asian or Semitic features and characteristics including mysticism, primitivism, and antisocial or licentious behavior,<sup>360</sup> none of them were as persistent associating them with occult knowledge as this small group of screenwriters in Weimar Germany—and none of them modeled their figures in the same way after the Gnostic Aeon Lucifer. It is imperative to understand, then, that the ‘Gnostic’ Lucifer was recognized by neither ancient nor modern heterodoxies as synonymous with what became mainstream Christianity’s conception of Satan, though the two may share various attributes.<sup>361</sup> When elucidating on the malicious Satan, Steiner indicated:

This was not a view of primitive Christianity; it entered Christianity only later. Even among the Christian mystics of the first centuries (the Gnostics), the serpent did not symbolize evil, but rather the spiritual guidance of humanity. The ‘wise one,’ the leader, was called the ‘serpent.’ This described the one who led humanity to knowledge. The serpent is the symbol of Lucifer.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> Prominent examples include, from the United States, William Nigh’s *Mr. Wu* (1919), D.W. Griffith’s *Broken Blossoms: or the Yellow Man and the Girl* (1919), and Rowland V. Lee’s *The Mysterious Dr. Fu Manchu* (1929).

<sup>361</sup> For a general outline of the differences between the orthodox conception of Lucifer and the theosophical understanding, see Blavatsky, “What’s in a Name? Why the Magazine is called ‘Lucifer’,” *Lucifer: A Theosophical Magazine Designed to “Bring to Light the Hidden Things of Darkness”* 1 (September 1887): 1-6.

<sup>362</sup> Steiner continued, relating Lucifer to another Semitic figure in German fantasy literature and film—Mephistopheles: “In the changing Faust legend we can follow the transformation of the way which Lucifer principle was understood.

Likewise, in 1920s Germany this distinct racialist motif surrounding these shady “light bearers” is significant for its frequency among this small group of filmmakers. Such investigation would provide both a historical as well as an aesthetic understanding of their cultural significances and their intended meaning by the screenwriters and directors who devised them—not merely for their social and political implications (if any), but more importantly their *esoteric significance* that, as the fantasy genre itself suggests, alludes more to the realm of myth and allegory than to literalism and historicity.<sup>363</sup>

### INNER SPARK

When interpreted on the level of narrative, the downfall of the futuristic cities in *Algol* and *Metropolis* echoes the same warning that professional researchers of occult phenomena had already issued their materialist colleagues beginning in the late nineteenth century. In their plotlines, Hans Brennert, Fridel Köhne, and Thea von

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Faust was a figure from the Middle Ages – half charlatan, half black magician – who practices all kinds of arts but gradually came to represent a certain archetype to people in that era. The Faust legend is the opposite of the Luther legend. Luther is the man of God who, with Bible in hand, resists evil and throws an inkwell at the Devil./ Faust, on the other hand, at first sets the Bible aside and becomes a physician who seeks wisdom instead of mere revelations of faith. Faust is fetched by the Devil and is destroyed. The greatness of Goethe is that he allows Faust to be redeemed. This is a complete transformation of how the Faust character has been understood in past centuries. Goethe cast the luciferic principle in the form of Mephistopheles against Faust. (*Mephis* means ‘liar,’ *tophel* means ‘ruiner’; it is a Hebraic name taken from ancient teachings of magic.) Faust is the white magician, in contrast to Mephistopheles, who represents the emergence of black magic. Goethe does not allow Faust to fall to Mephistopheles” (*The Christian Mystery* 107).

<sup>363</sup>In his brief exhibition of Gnosticism, Elder draws a similar conclusion; but his penchant to anticipate National Socialist racism in Weimar cinema undermines his professed commitment to read the esoteric allegories behind fantasy films. For example: “That the film distinguishes good and bad aesthetic value with Germanic and Jewish cultures, respectively, for in that Lang associates image-building with the ‘typically Jewish’ enthusiasm for ‘bad magic,’ that is, bad religion, much as he associated the evil powers of Dr. Mabuse with the Orient [...], though, of course, in the end the forces of good ensnare Mabuse and he goes mad. In *Die Nibelungen*, Siegfried is killed by virtue of his unwitting involvement with the bad powers” (Haller 52). But it is too simplistic to assert that the filmmakers of Weimar Germany projected onto these figures certain racialist characteristics and attributes that they felt symbolized dark spiritual forces. After all, Hans Brennert was known for his communistic internationalism and respect for Judaism. See esp. his commentary in „Vom Egoismus in der Liebe,“ in Arthur Dix, ed. *Der Egoismus* (Leipzig: Verlag von Freund & Wittig, 1899): 293-302. In addition, Thea von Harbou’s fantastical tales about Indian mysticism and dark, handsome Orient princes bewitched by nubile European women had as much to do with personal infatuations as popular melodrama. Her eleven-year marriage with Lang came to an end when in 1934 the director found his wife in bed with Ayi Tendulkar, an Indian college student who was 17 years her junior. Later, in spite of her involvement in National Socialism, she housed a number of Indian students in her Berlin apartment during the 1936 Olympics and even contracted a clandestine marriage with Tendulkar. See Patrick McGilligan, *Fritz Lang: The Nature of the Beast* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997/2003): 184. Contrary what have often been disparaged as racist portrayals of Asians and Jews in their films, these filmmakers were drawn, not opposed, to the ancient East.

Harbou suggested that, left to its own devices, the material science embraced by Robert Herne and Joh Fredersen would destroy itself for its stubborn refusal to acknowledge its own transcendental underpinnings, embodied in the primeval knowledge of Algol and Rotwang. Appropriately, in both stories the antagonism between matter and spirit intensifies as Robert and Joh become increasingly bent in wielding supernatural technologies toward their own self-serving whims. Just as psychical researchers and occult enthusiasts awaited more precise scientific and technological acumen to ascertain the supernatural basis of force and matter, the salvation for these filmic civilizations comes with a new and more profound generation, one to which these transcendental underpinnings have manifested themselves through the medium of science and technology.

Henrik Galeen, Hanns Walter Kornblum, and (again) von Harbou expressed an identical position in their novels and screenplays for *Alraune*, *Wunder der Schöpfung*, and *Frau im Mond*.<sup>364</sup> Inspired by the industrially driven environments in which they were raised, youthful characters turn with vim and vigor in bolstering the paradigm-smashing theories of their elders. In *Alraune*, the precocious young woman, realizing that her entire life has been nothing more than an extravagant experiment, seeks vengeance on Prof. ten Brinken for his cynical endeavors. Yet in embracing her identity as a modern-day fulfillment of the mandrake myth, Alraune simultaneously confirms and avenges her “father” the biochemist for his transgressions. In *Wunder der Schöpfung*, a crew of astrophysicists take off in interstellar spaceflight thanks to the revolutionary insight of astronomers in memorial, who, inspired by an intuited altruism, have fostered a

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<sup>364</sup> Ewers’ novel *Alraune* is fraught with expositions regarding the feasibility of turning occult superstitions into scientific realities.

universal community of enlightenment. It is thus the long-term collaboration of this community that makes factual what was previously relegated to imagination. In *Frau im Mond*, Wolf Helius and Walt Turner redeem the ostracized Prof. Manfeldt by realizing his theoretical plans for rocket flight to the moon, preserved in the visionary's compilation of decades-old research. As the old man's "dreams" become realized, his subsequent visions prove equally real as the crew, embarking on its mission, struggles to determine what people on their home planet should know and what they should not.

This allegorical struggle to ascertain and ultimately master the material realm is, in the scheme of Weimar science fiction cinema, symbolized in the filmmakers' challenge to their characters to transcend their surroundings through the salvific knowledge as revealed in science and technology. In order to evoke the notion that their characters in their films were driven by an instantaneous inspiration—a moment of personal illumination akin to Gnostic *anamnesis*—the creators behind Weimar Germany's science fiction films cleverly drew aesthetic connections between the Enlightenment associations with light as a representation as scientific knowledge and darkness as ignorance of that knowledge. But, as discussed above, because their portrayals of "enlightenment" symbolized at the same time the inner illumination of a qualitatively different spiritual reality, these filmmakers gave ironic twists to the connotations of objective, rationalist principles of modern science and technology.

In keeping with the heterodox understanding of the mythical Aeon Lucifer during the revival of Gnosticism, these filmmakers used the proverbial inner light—if not signified by a luciferic character, then at least signified metaphorically by a nimbus or an electric

light<sup>365</sup>—to presage personal transformation, social reform, and the extinguishing of superstition and materialist ignorance. But this process is easier said than done, and the protagonist often finds himself bombarded by violent, cataclysmic forces that oppose his mission. These seemingly spontaneous obstacles are allegorically in keeping with the teachings of German-speaking mystics during the *fin de siècle*, who indicated that any neophyte who persists on the path to self-mastery will naturally encounter a cavalcade of spiritual terrors. As Heindel wrote on the eve of the Great War:

We have already lived through a mineral, a plant, and an animal-like existence before becoming human as we are today, and beyond us lie still further evolutions where we shall approach the Divine more and more. It will be readily conceded that it is our animal passions which restrain us upon the path of attainment; the lower nature is constantly warring against the higher self. At least in those who have experienced a spiritual awakening, a war is being fought silently within, and is all the more bitter for being suppressed.<sup>366</sup>

Evoked in the apocalyptic violence of anthropomorphic technologies in *Algol* and *Metropolis*, the holistic reconciliations of revealed theories in *Wunder der Schöpfung*, the discovery of the biochemist's unsettling testimony in *Alraune*, and the struggle to preserve the secrets of the moon gold in *Frau im Mond*, the characters in Weimar science fiction 'awaken' to purportedly long-hidden realities that, whether repressed or forgotten, uncover truths stranger than fiction. Analogous to the Gnostic anthropogony and cosmogony, they realize that neither man nor the universe is entirely as static or unified as one might otherwise assume, and that everything exists in a state of continual evolution between forces of good and evil.

Further research is required to determine to what extent, if any, Weimar filmmakers associated the Gnostic conception of the warring forces of good and evil with the tragedy

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<sup>365</sup> This is the case during the moments of *anamnesis* in *Wunder* and *Alraune*, respectively.

<sup>366</sup> Heindel, *Gleanings of a Mystic* 35.

of the Great War. Scholars have long indicated that Weimar fantasy filmmakers made implicit, metaphorical, and at times subliminal references to Europeans' shared experience of total war.<sup>367</sup> It is hardly unlikely that, just as they drew on industrial modernism to elucidate the Gnostic worldview about human estrangement in the material world (discussed more in the next chapter), that these filmmakers likewise drew on shared experiences of mechanized warfare in order to stress the existential transformations of their protagonists which, symbolically, signify spiritual development or digression. During and after the war, rightist intellectuals including Oswald Spengler and Ernst Jünger published popular philosophical works that, attracting much acclaim by the German public after the war, mixed a disillusionment with old patriarchal authorities and a renewed, ferocious, overtly mystical enthusiasm for science and technology as a salvific avenue for the “fallen” West. For them, to die in battle at one’s machine could signify liberation from human listlessness and the banal regimentation of everyday life.<sup>368</sup>

Intriguingly, while spiritual adepts like Heindel, Steiner, and Reuss were unequivocally opposed to the onslaught of the Great War and the technocratic pseudomysticism of Oswald and Jünger, each of them viewed Europe’s four-year struggle as portending some sort of spiritual significance for the future of the human race.<sup>369</sup> At the headquarters for the Anthroposophical Society in September and October 1917, Steiner

<sup>367</sup> See esp. Anton Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), which reviews the fantasy films *Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari*, *Nosferatu*, *Die Nibelungen*, and *Metropolis*—all which exude with occult and Gnostic overtones—as part of the German Expressionist reaction to the widespread trauma and aftermath of the Great War in Germany.

<sup>368</sup> This is among the arguments in Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Similarly, Kaes’ masterful scholarship links Spengler, Jünger, and other such popular writers of the 1920s with German Expressionist vein of Weimar cinema; see esp. Kaes 31, 168-169, 171-174; 121-122; 217n3. Further research must elucidate how the similarities between these thinkers and the warlike scenes found throughout the German Expressionist movement reflected as much about peculiarly darker practices of mysticism and the occult as they did popular conceptions of technology and science.

<sup>369</sup> As will be seen in upcoming chapters, Heindel foresaw a trend towards a mystified, and yet highly scientific, global community in the future. Reuss saw the war as an opportunity to thrash old beliefs in Christianity and to restore Christianity to its esoteric origins through Tantric sex magic and alchemical teachings of the Gnostic Neo-Christians. See Reuss 31.

held a lecture series to address the three-year tragedy of the Great War and its implications for each spiritual seeker in “the quest for knowledge.” He contrasted the uninitiated masses with “anyone who was awake through the science of the spirit,” reminding those in attendance:

There will, of course, be many today – as there always have been – who may be said to sleep through the events of the day, people who are not fully awake to what is going on today. But when those who are awake look back on what went through their minds four or five years ago and left an impression, they will feel more or less the way one does when one lets the mind dwell on an old book or a work of art that was created hundreds of years ago. Events which meant something to us before this madness came on the world now seem to have happened an indefinitely long time ago.<sup>370</sup>

According to Steiner, the mayhem of industrial warfare offered the spiritual scientist unlikely opportunities to find inward psychical strength and to aid the material-minded masses who were still enslaved by baser biological and physiological impulses. For the initiate, then, it was time to separate the wheat from the chaff. Most significantly, he interpreted the war as the earthly expression of a struggle between spiritual entities of the East and West, viz. the spirits of Lucifer.

Steiner’s associating the luciferic spirits with globalization, the spiritual conflict between East and West, and the greedy self-destruction of European civilization certainly call to mind the storylines in *Algol* and *Metropolis*, but they likewise call to mind the traumatized reactions of Alraune, Manfeldt, Freder, Robert, and others, whose visions are provoked (even if metaphorically) by the luciferic influences in Weimar science fiction. These reactions are not calm, blissful reactions one might expect from divine revelation.

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<sup>370</sup> Rudolf Steiner, Anna Meuss, trans. “The Driving Forces Behind Europe’s War: Dornach, 29 September 1917,” *The Fall of the Spirits of Darkness: Fourteen Lectures given in Dornach 29 September-28 October* (Bristol: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1993): 15-16. In this lecture, Steiner goes on, to say that “Anyone who was awake – through the science of the spirit – was, of course, able to appreciate what was coming even before these events developed. Many of our friends will remember the almost routine answer I gave to questions asked over and over again after my public lectures from the beginning of this century” (16).

In fact, their attributes are comparable to shell shock (originally coined in the German *Kriegsneurose*, or “war neurosis”), an ill-defined medical condition that originated from the trenches of the Great War. Realized to have life-altering affects in the years following the war, shell shock covered a large terrain of psychological and physical illnesses that baffled not only military officials but the medical establishment as well. Even the healthiest soldiers could be stricken by a severe collapse, exhibiting symptoms that ranged from catatonia to blindness, from shaking to rigor mortis. The number of victims turning paranoid, hysterical, and crying uncontrollably was unprecedented and only began with the end of the war.<sup>371</sup>

Weimar science fiction, then, draws a subtle yet fairly consistent aesthetic connections between Gnostic *anamnesis* and traumatic encounters with and discoveries of science and technology. While this association offers nothing on a literal reading of these filmic narratives—after all, Heindel, Reuss, and Steiner saw wartime as the ultimate impediment to spiritual growth<sup>372</sup>—symbolically this association represents the esoteric struggle *already* taking place within each individual on superconscious levels. Indeed, the involuntary flashbacks, repetition compulsions, and psychosomatic illnesses indicative of shell shock bear striking similarities to the horrific imagery and explosive chaos found in the apocalyptic literature of ancient Gnostic Christianity.<sup>373</sup> These shared characteristics should hardly come as a surprise, since the Gnostics turned to altered states of consciousness in order to access the private revelatory inspiration for their

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<sup>371</sup> See Kaes 13.

<sup>372</sup> As Heindel notes: “The battlefield is the last place anyone with a sane mind would choose for the purpose of soul growth, though it is not to be forgotten that much of this has been made by noble deeds of self-sacrifice there; but such results have been achieved *in spite of* condition and not because of it.” Heindel, *Gleanings of a Mystic* 123-124.

<sup>373</sup> A good discussion on *fin-de-siècle* views on the violence and judgment in early Christian and Jewish apocalyptic literature is found in W.O.E. Oesterley’s introduction to R.H. Charles’s translation of *The Book of Enoch* (Minaola, NY: Dover Publications, 1893/1917): vii-xiii.

scriptural narratives, encountering demons, dragons, and other evil forces along their journeys.<sup>374</sup> While there are obviously fundamental differences between total war and mystic vision, noting the similarities of these seemingly contradictory notions can help understand how, in the context of the early twentieth century, German directors and screenwriters possibly conceived aesthetic parallels between popular depictions of the Great War and their understanding of ancient Gnosticism in the making of their science fiction films.<sup>375</sup> The inception of shell shock could, like *anamnesis*, bombard the soldier at any given time, transforming his habits, his lifestyle, his identity forever.

Filled with its supernaturalist overtones, for example, Robert Herne's overwhelmed reaction to the mysterious machine in *Algol* could easily be interpreted, given the scene's context of industrial oppression, as a portrayal of neurasthenia turned into shell shock. Prying to know the secrets of his lodger, the exhausted foreman suddenly shudders with surprise when he beholds that Algol has smuggled into the upstairs chamber of his tiny barrack an advanced mechanical apparatus. On sight the device both entices and repulses Robert. What powers this device? How does it work? What is its purpose? Even while the little man answers these questions with his texts, the grimy miner, no longer interested in stale tomes, gazes spellbound at the peculiar machine. Then, when its parts are suddenly activated in a shower of sparks and flashes, he dashes toward the machine with unbridled curiosity. But its intricate movements and its uncanny swiftness instantly repel Robert and the entire chimera deduces him to a convulsing, stuttering, grimacing

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<sup>374</sup> See e.g. the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, *The Testament of Solomon*, and *The Book of Enoch*, all which were widely published during the prewar Gnostic revival.

<sup>375</sup> There are various similarities between near-death experiences and the narratives/experiences described in Gnostic texts. This observation is not exclusive to observations about postwar cinema in European culture. Recent psychological approaches to Gnostic texts confirm these often striking parallels. See e.g. Brian A. Bain, "Near Death Experiences and Gnostic Christianity: Parallels in Antiquity," *Journal of Near-Death Experiences* 17 (Spring 1999): 205-209.

state. Later, in a theme that echoes throughout Weimar science fiction, Robert must overcome his trauma by withdrawing with the machine in order to contemplate, master, and fuse himself with its occult technology.<sup>376</sup> Robert's moment of trauma is also his moment of *anamnesis*.<sup>377</sup>

Thus anamnesis signifies an *inner* realization about the *outer* environment. Explaining the teachings of Gnosticism, Steiner noted that, counter to orthodox Christianity, Lucifer and Christ were originally thought to function as dual spiritual influences that, upon cycling through an individual's consciousness, awakened man to supersensible reality as well as his potential to attune himself, respectively:

The God of love worked above human beings; within them Lucifer, the light, worked. To reach love one must first become light. Through the appearance of Christ Jesus this light has been transformed into love. Christ Jesus represents the elevation of light to love. In earlier times people spoke of Lucifer as the opposite pole that brought light to humanity. Two powers must work on the Earth: the bearer of love (Christ) and the bearer of light (Lucifer). Light and love are two poles for humanity. We now live subject to the influences of these two forces that appear as a polarity. The gods who give the impulse for love were once light, and light is now called upon to become love. Light can be misused and lead to evil, but it must exist if we are to become free.<sup>378</sup>

Lucifer imparted knowledge to mankind whose greatest impetus was given in inspiration by Christ's altruism, which in turn man only properly apprehends through the abuse, correction, and amelioration of his freewill as he manifests into the material realm with his body those thought forms which find their driving impetus in the psychic faculties of the individual. The former is thus a prerequisite for the latter. But while this chapter has

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<sup>376</sup> Though his appearance has not been elucidated, in *Metropolis* Rotwang's prosthetic arm is the product of his attempt to create the Machine-Man. But, intoxicated by the alchemical vision to create a subservient life form, the inventor does not count his disfigurement as any true cost. As he says in the film: „Nun, Joh Fredersen – ?! Lohnt es sich nicht, eine Hände zu verlieren, um den Menschen der Zukunft – den Maschinen-Menschen geschaffen zu haben – ?!“ Quite literally, he too has had to assimilate himself with technology in order to glean the advanced occult knowledge symbolized in futuristic technology.

<sup>377</sup> See commentary in n34 and n38 of this chapter.

<sup>378</sup> Steiner, *The Christian Mystery* 111.

explained how Lucifer reawakens mankind to the supersensible, the next will explain the second polar influence residing in humanity, the so-called “Christ-impulse.”<sup>379</sup>

By imbuing their films with the sinister and the demented, the directors and screenwriters behind science fiction in the 1920s were, much like other artists in Germany, set on lending a mournful voice to a nation mangled by the catastrophe of world war and its aftermath. In their estranged environments, the characters of these films struggle to maintain their identity against the chaotic tribulations of a torturous death, whose looming threat often arises in sudden and explosive demonstrations of excruciating physical injury and psychotic neuroses. The most common and perhaps the greatest distinguishing visual aesthetic which these filmmakers used to express this struggle was their filmic interplay of light flooding, probing, and sometimes dying out altogether in a void of darkness. At the center of this interplay of light and darkness stands the salvific power of science and technology that, in addition to saving those worthy of its knowledge, radically transforms its avatars in challenging everything they thought they had known about their existence. But in order to explain the human condition of postwar modernism, the filmmakers of Weimar science fiction pulled from yet more complex themes that had been thoroughly discussed in the *fin-de-siècle* revival of Gnosticism.

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<sup>379</sup> Steiner used the term “Christ impulse” quite frequently and in varying contexts when discussing the redemptive qualities of Jesus and humanity as a whole.



Fig. 3.1: Standing behind Algol with antenna in hand, Robert gazes at a most unusual contraption on the desk in his upstairs chamber. Accepting the challenge to enhance the machine's power, the appalled miner's disposition goes from fearful....



Fig. 3.2: ...To masterful. Within one year, Robert calmly paces the halls of his Bios-Works, whose giant complex of swirling machinery producing the world's most efficient energy supply. Only its designer's mind knows the occult inspiration behind this life-changing technology.



Fig. 3.3: In *Wunder der Schöpfung*, observatories take many forms as the global community of scientists grope to understand the heavens with ever-greater precision and sophistication. Pictured above is Erich Mendelsohn's *Einstein Tower* ("Einstein Tower") at Potsdam.



Fig. 3.4: In all eons, however, one thing remains the same for those yearning for higher knowledge: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing awe: 'the starry heavens above me, and the moral law within me.' Emmanuel Kant."



Fig. 3.5: "Moloch!" Bombarded by the power of occult technology, the awakened Freder lingers between illusion and true knowledge in coping with the revelations that challenge his hitherto placid understanding of his father's city. (Compare with Fig. 13.)

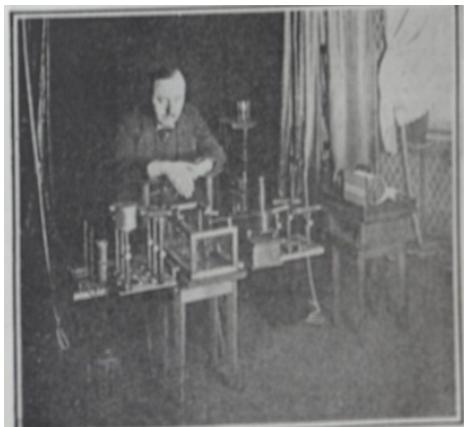


Fig. 3.7: In this photograph from the "Psychic Laboratory of Fritz Grunewald," the medium Ejner Nielsen places his hand over a special balance and magnetic needle hooked up to a recording instrument. Dr. Grunewald instructed Nielsen to exert his psychic faculties on the needle, whose deflection the instrument recorded on a ticker-tape display that would "prove" his telekinetic abilities.<sup>381</sup> Similarly in Weimar science fiction, *technology* and the *protagonist* are analogous to the instrument (balance, needle, recording device) and the research object (Nielsen and his will) in Grunewald's experiment, respectively.

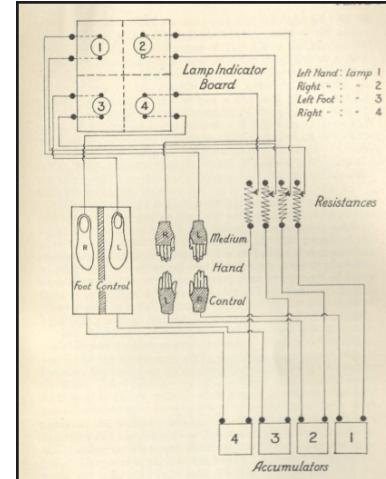


Fig. 3.6: This diagram demonstrates the wiring connections for the hands and feet of the medium and principal investigator, which, according to its inventor Schrenck-Notzing, limited potential fraud and detected the slightest electrical impulse emitted between the medium and investigator.<sup>380</sup>



Fig. 3.8: In *Der müde Tod*, the Gnostic Lucifer is symbolized by the figure Death. Lang depicted the heroine ascending the steps to Death, which appear miraculously from his seemingly impenetrable castle wall. While Death is clothed in black, his entire abode is, paradoxically, illuminated by the candlelight representing individual souls of humanity. He is, then, truly the "light bearer." In the image above, the revelation of the castle's entrance not only leads the girl closer to the fantastic; it leads to her departure from the physical world and closer to her spiritual illumination, signified by her own figure appearing to be the flame atop a candle.<sup>382</sup>

<sup>380</sup> Price Plate I; see also description of the device in 8-10.

<sup>381</sup> Treitel, *A Science for the Soul* 136-138; image 137.

<sup>382</sup> Image from *Der müde Tod (Destiny)*. DVD. Directed by Fritz Lang (1921; Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2000).



Fig. 3.9: In *Schatten*, the mysterious shadow player leaps into the foyer of a wealthy manor, flirting with a female servant. His unpredictable behavior, habitual crouch, horn-like hairstyle, and upturned coattails call to mind the Greek god Pan. As the shadow player begins his performance with his magic lantern, which includes projecting Chinese puppets onto the wall, it becomes obvious that the shadow player represents Lucifer, whose more sinister characteristics theosophical circles typically associated with Pan.<sup>383</sup>



Fig. 3.10: In Part I of *Die Nibelungen*, the hero Siegfried follows the luciferic Alberich into the cave housing the treasure of the “children of the mist.” Similar to the protagonists in *Metropolis* and *Algol*, Siegfried discovers the prodigious power of his luciferic counterpart in the depths. Also, the magical properties of this hidden power result in his transformation into the “King of Twelve Knights.” Thus the initiate finds his own true source of power and identity only if led by the Light Bearer into the profundity of his being, in whose dismal depths the light becomes stronger and the inner truth made manifest.<sup>384</sup>



Fig. 3.11: After restoring the aging alchemist to his youth in *Faust*, the luciferic Mephisto entices the mortal with the luminescent vision of a veiled woman who, passing before him, vanishes before his eyes. Unbeknownst to Faust, his initial pursuit for the maiden becomes a quest which renews him more spiritually than physically. As discussed in the next chapter, Freder and Robert’s transformations also begin with pursuits of love.<sup>385</sup>



Fig. 3.12: In *Metropolis*, Rotwang’s laboratory boasts the science of the future. The connection between medieval alchemy and modern science is not at all contradictory, since his robots and automatic doorways are shown to be part of this magical technology.<sup>386</sup>

<sup>383</sup> It is no coincidence that Albin Grau wrote and produced this drama as the first film at his own “Pan-Film” company, which he established in 1923 immediately after the lawsuit concerning *Nosferatu*. See a discussion of Lucifer and Pan in Blavatsky, “The History of a Planet,” *Lucifer: A Theosophical Magazine Designed to “Bring to Light the Hidden Things of Darkness”* 1 (September 1887): 22. Image from *Warning Shadows: A Nocturnal Hallucination (orig. Schatten: Eine nächtliche Halluzination)* DVD. Directed by Arthur Robison (1923; New York, NY: Kino International, 2006).

<sup>384</sup> Image from *Die Nibelungen*. DVD. Directed by Fritz Lang (1924; New York, NY: Kino International Corp, 2002).

<sup>385</sup> Image from *Faust: Eine deutsche Volkssage*. DVD. Directed by F.W. Murnau (1926; New York, NY: Kino



Fig. 3.13: A disembodied Algol wreaks havoc in Robert's factory. "More! More!" the sadistic being praises his apprentice, unobserved by the workers he terrorizes: "Each day 1,000 machines for Robert Herne, the usurer of the world!"<sup>387</sup> His malevolent praise of usury is yet another subtle connection between Semitic stereotypes and depictions of Lucifer.



Fig. 3.14: In *Metropolis*, the "light bearer" Rotwang reveals his darker side when, after squelching Maria's own flickering candle in the subterranean catacombs, he probes his electric lamp onto the quivering girl. His light edging up her body, her dismayed expression bespeaks her predator's base desires.<sup>388</sup>



Fig. 3.15: Influenced by oriental fashions, a sprawling heap of partygoers cheer: "Long live Reginald Herne—the Ruler of the World!"<sup>389</sup> But their euphoria proves short-lived, since the young degenerate has apparently not learned from his usurped father how to maintain the "eternal power" behind the Bios-Works.

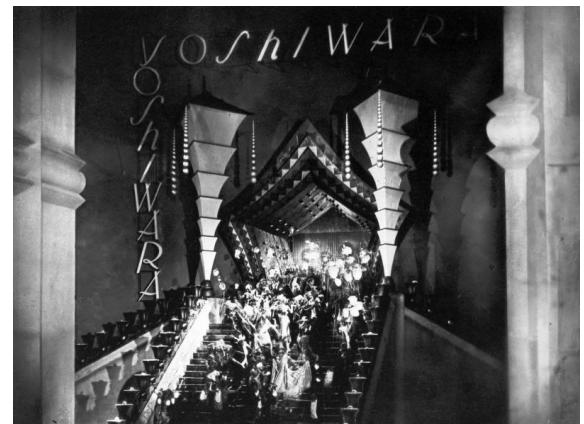


Fig. 3.16: The red-light district Yoshiwara, a cosmopolitan center of macabre decadence. After the electrical generators of the city have exploded, the Machine-Man in the form of Maria shouts to the insatiable revelers: "We should all watch as the world goes to the devil –!"<sup>390</sup> The luciferic agents in *Metropolis* and *Algol* become more 'devil'-like as the climax mounts.

International, 2001). See also Cobb 164.

<sup>386</sup> See the discussion of Rotwang's "technology as modern magic" in Gunning 64-68.

<sup>387</sup> Original: „Weiter! Weiter! Täglich 1000 Maschinen für Robert Herne, den Wucherer der Welt! /...und keine Sonne – und 15 Stunden am Webstuhl – ! Täglich 1000 Teppiche als Preis für den Strom! [...] /Das tausendste Opfer für Robert Herne!“

<sup>388</sup> Rotwang's intent to violate Maria becomes explicit during the climax of the film. Indeed, his entire relationship with her during the course of von Harbou's novel and screenplay is an attempt to gain some sort of mastery over her corporeal self. See esp. discussion in Huyssen, 230-232.

<sup>389</sup> Original: „[Im Taumel des Triumphes] /,Es lebe Reginald Herne—der Herr der Welt!“

<sup>390</sup> Original: „Wir wollen zusehen, wie die Welt zum Teufel geht – !“

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**GNOSTIC FORCES IN THE ABSURDITY OF POSTWAR MODERNISM**

When penning the novel version of *Metropolis* in 1924, von Harbou had voiced her Gnostic intentions in no uncertain terms. Serialized in the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* and subsequently printed as a book in 1926, the novel's prologue portends the epigram that would appear in the cinematic version almost three years later:

This book is not a picture of the present.  
 This book is not a picture of the future.  
 This book tells of no place.  
 This book serves no cause, no party, no class.  
 This book is a moral [*Geschehen*] that entwines itself around an insight  
 [*Erkenntnis*]:  
**“The mediator between the head and the hands must be the heart.”**<sup>391</sup>

Not only does this passage leave no question regarding allegorical narrative, its wordplay reveals von Harbou's hidden purpose of the book. While often translated as “moral” in English, the German *Geschehen* can, especially in its verb form, connote a process, a happening, or something that comes about, as though by evolutionary means. Likewise, *Erkenntnis* may translate as “perception,” “knowledge,” even “insight”—all terms intimately redolent of *gnosis*. As demonstrated in Chapter I, the occult (i.e., hidden) power behind Gnosticism lies in the individual's aptitude to recognize the holistic reality between matter and spirit. Likewise, by encrypting this message for the worthy reader, von Harbou by all means set forth her novel—as well as her subsequent screenplay—as a

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<sup>391</sup> Von Harbou's original text is printed in bold. Gunning and others cite an apparently poor English translation of the novel, so the German original is included here in order to clarify von Harbou's wordplay: „Dieses Buch ist kein Gegenwartsbild. Dieses Buch ist kein Zukunftsbild. Dieses Buch spielt nirgendwo. Dieses Buch dient keiner Tendenz, keiner Klasse, keiner Partei. Dieses Buch ist ein Geschehen, das sich um eine Erkenntnis rankt: „Mittler zwischen Hirn und Händen muß das Herz sein“, *Metropolis* (Berlin: August Scherl Verlag GmbH, 1926): 7. Cf. Tom Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity* (London: British Film Institute, 2000): 54-55.

Gnostic hermeneutic whose esoteric significance would reveal itself to the initiated.<sup>392</sup>

Surely for any scholar versed in the mystical arts, it is painfully obvious that the cinematic epigram that adapts this passage heaves with a synthesis of unprecedented special effects and futuristic plot themes on whose union the director Lang and the screenwriter von Harbou no doubt collaborated in order to convey a tale of spiritual significance for industrial modernism. To the uninitiated, Lang and von Harbou's science-fiction story tells merely of a technocrat, Joh Fredersen, who has become a tyrant in his ambition to make a perfect city for his son, Freder. In this city lives the mysterious inventor Rotwang, an alchemist-scientist who in his earlier years was a friend to the enterprising Fredersen until the latter took from him his only true love, Hel, who perished while giving birth to Freder. Despite his animosity, however, Rotwang assists Fredersen in suppressing the city workers. Having become subjugated under Fredersen's rule are these workers live segregated from the glorious upper levels of the city in subterranean apartments. Among this oppressed class has arisen a young prophetess, Maria, who leads the workers in passive resistance of their tyrannical ruler in the expectation of a mediator. Upon learning Maria's message, the young Freder realizes himself to be the foretold mediator, and, with the help of Maria, the two eventually defeat the malicious Rotwang and convince Fredersen to recreate his city into one of peace and harmony.

In hindsight *Metropolis* has become hailed a highly original icon of Weimar cinema. But an almost identical scenario was presaged in Hans Brennert and Fridel Köhne's script for Hans Werckmeister's *Algol*. However, rather than a happy end, Brennert and Köhne

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<sup>392</sup> At the same time, by designating its hermeneutic, she also set parameters to the ultimate evaluation of her novel as exclusively a tale of inner illumination. In other words, the dystopia herein hosts a sort of *a priori* relationship with the reader as simultaneously object and subject.

composed a screenplay with a message *reversed* from the film that would shadow it seven years later. In *Algol*, upon transforming himself from a coalminer into a mighty industrialist, Robert Herne weds the beautiful Empress Leonore Nissen, whose coal basin has become obsolete due to his electric company, the Bios-Works. Secretly, this powerhouse channels occult rays from the planet Algol, whose lone inhabitant offered Robert the technological knowledge so that the mortal might establish for himself a mighty nation. But after twenty years Robert's covetousness proves stronger than his love for Leonore, who bears him two children, Reginald and Magda. While Reginald succumbs to his passions while spoiling his inheritance, Magda enjoys her time in her father's sprawling gardens until one day an injured worker—Peter Hell, the son of Maria Obal—lures her away from her pristine life to reveal the corruption of her father's powerful state. Frustrated that both his children have betrayed his will, Robert finally tells Leonore that he will no longer hide his secret, the Algol-Machine, from her. But when he escorts the aged empress into his Hall of Eternal Power, the central wheel of the machine spontaneously electrocutes her to death, and Robert is left alone with his power. Having lost his love to the vengeful Algol, he descends into madness.

When examining the similarities between *Algol* and *Metropolis*, one might rather crudely assert that while collaborating on the plot of *Metropolis* Lang and von Harbou plagiarized the cinematic drama pieced together by Hans Werckmeister and his screenwriters in *Algol*. Undoubtedly, the plotlines, themes, characters, and visuals of both films share striking similarities. But while this presumption links the later film to its forerunner, its solution undermines the fact that both films point to a common inspiration in Gnostic teachings. Though perhaps easily understood on an interpersonal drama,

represents an esoteric dialogue of the psyche steeped in strong Gnostic overtones based largely on the interplay of social problems and gender roles. In both *Algol* and *Metropolis*, the portrayal of these social problems and gender roles reflected not only common concerns during the pre- and postwar eras in German-speaking Europe, they also resonated with the central doctrines of the esoteric schools including especially the Anthroposophical, Rosicrucian, and Theosophical Societies, as well as Ordo Templi Orientis and Fraternitas Saturni as well as contemporary historical and scientific research from the Gnostic revival in early twentieth-century Europe.

#### FORCES OF DARKNESS

After his initiation by Rudolf Steiner into Anthroposophy at Berlin, the Danish-American engineer Max Heindel returned to the United States in November 1908 from a two-year spiritual sojourn in Germany. Plaguing his mind was the possibility of international conflict in Europe. An adept Rosicrucian and a founding member of Steiner's newly formed "Esoteric School," Heindel contemplated the implications of mechanized warfare for human suffering.<sup>393</sup> Alluding to the arms race, the Morocco Crisis, and unrest in the Balkans, he noted:

The Christian nations maintain and have maintained all along armies and navies. They pay inventors enormous prices for inventing machine guns and high explosives wherewith to destroy their fellow men. All over the Western World has gone the battle cry and nothing has equaled this religion in fierceness and destructiveness. The religion of Buddha has won its many hundred millions without the cost of a single life, but this religion of the Western World has cost rivers and rivers of blood; has brought untold sorrow and misery into this world. We see it gradually spreading its bloody trail as these Western nations go all over the world, carrying the sword of Christ, overcoming and subjecting the nations of the world.

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<sup>393</sup> See Ger Westenberg, Elizabeth C. Ray, trans. *Max Heindel and the Rosicrucian Fellowship* (Madison, WI: The Rosicrucian Fellowship Publishing Co., 2009/2010): 59-60.

Even when there is peace within the nations we have every day the war of competition. Every man's hand is against every other man's; there is no cooperation in this cruel struggle. We see on every hand the evidence of this in the growth of trust systems. All over there is a great strife and struggle.<sup>394</sup>

While Heindel praised modern man's strides in science and technology, he was equally quick to lament that this earthly progress was propelled by selfish, self-destructive motives as much as benevolence, humanitarianism, and an earnest curiosity about human beings and the universe.<sup>395</sup> War, Heindel suggested, was on the horizon for Europe, and the shock would rock its nations of the complacency, vainglory, and unbridled hubris that charged their race for resources, profit, and power.

Raised and living in Europe when the German Empire surpassed all other world nations in its technological power and industrial output, Rudolf Steiner, Carl Kellner, Theodor Reuss, and other contemporary mystics acknowledged that, in spite modernity's innovations, the world was imperfect and, as in the teachings of Buddha and Christ, full of suffering.<sup>396</sup> At the start of the twentieth century, the rediscovery of Gnosticism provided them with a potent remedy against the so-called progress of the industrial West brought on by material science. Severed from all spiritual doctrine, they warned, the logic behind material science would collapse on itself, and the unintended consequence of this disaster would be even more suffering.<sup>397</sup> It would seem that European society

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<sup>394</sup> Max Heindel, "Lecture Sixteen: The Star of Bethlehem: A Mystical Fact; delivered November 1908," *The Rosicrucian Christianity Lectures* Fifth Edition (Oceanside, CA: Rosicrucian Fellowship, 1939/2012): 257-258.

<sup>395</sup> See particular his praise of science and technology in "Lecture XIX: The Cosmic Force" in *The Rosicrucian Christianity Lectures* 324-325.

<sup>396</sup> The works of Steiner and Heindel are particularly focused on suffering as it relates to the teachings of Christianity and Buddhism. Franz Hartmann was also intrigued by the concept of suffering as a purificatory trial of the psyche: "Suffering is an absolutely necessary condition for man as long as he has not attained perfection. To believe in the presence of suffering is as necessary for his terrestrial nature as it is necessary for his spiritual nature to realize the presence of God. There is no other Redeemer of Mankind except Self-knowledge attained by experience." Hartmann, *Magic White and Black: Or, the Science of Finite and Infinite Life Containing Practical Hints for Students of Occultism* Fourth Edition Revised (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1893): 140.

<sup>397</sup> See Steiner's commentary in his lecture "The Driving Forces Behind Europe's War: Dornach, 29 September 1917," *The Fall of the Spirits of Darkness* 17-19, 25-26. See comments on Heindel, *Gleanings of a Mystic* Second Edition (Oceanside, CA: The Rosicrucian Fellowship, 1922/2011): 81-82, 180.

had merely fooled itself into believing in the false securities of what was its own constructed, and altogether naïve perception of reality. In addition to the violent and apocalyptic imagery, the science fiction films of Weimar Germany pulled from Gnostic mythologies to give an Expressionistic face to the materialistic, lustful, greedy spirit of postwar society. Nowhere was this better epitomized than in *Algol* and *Metropolis*.

### *The Demiurge & the Archons*

Associated with the revival of Gnosticism, this mystical standpoint took on the undertones of prophetic wisdom during the technological cataclysm of the Great War. In the face of widespread trauma, the esoteric teachings of Steiner, Reuss, and others rung with a decidedly sobering relevance for those who had long ignored their plaintive cry to unite science and technology with a mission of a new spiritual brotherhood instead of material-minded utopianism or even a revitalized Christianity.<sup>398</sup> Turning to ancient religious writings and modern research on Gnostic teachings, this universalistic breed of mystics realized that all religious traditions also profess that this world is a realm of imperfection filled with suffering, struggle, sickness, and death.<sup>399</sup> But while these religions differ in their explanations to account for this current state of existence and in their remedies to its condition, these mystics indicated, Gnosticism provides its own, and quite startling, explanation of these matters: the world is flawed because it was created in a flawed manner.

Although contemporaneous sects of Gnosticism existed throughout ancient history in

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<sup>398</sup> See esp. Theodor Reuss, ed. Peter-Robert Koenig, *Der Kleine Theodor Reuss Reader* (München: P.R. Koenig 1917/1993): 12-13. Steiner dedicated his lecture series *The Fall of the Spirits of Darkness* regarding not only how to endure the war as spiritual seekers, but also offering explanations to the political as well as psychical causes and resolutions to the war.

<sup>399</sup> See esp. Heindel, *Gleanings of a Mystic* 57-58.

a myriad of often mutually incompatible sects, scholars recognized that by the early first century most Gnostic-Christians had developed a common narrative about of the biblical Creator. However, while the Church Fathers who shaped orthodox Christianity reasoned that the biblical Creator constituted the subsistent act of being itself (i.e., a transcendent God), the Gnostics considered this deity as the highest being outside the boundary of the vast Pleroma.<sup>400</sup> Interpreting this god as a deity subject to space and time enabled the Gnostics to explain how the self-professed Father God in the Pentateuch (as well as “Gnostic” and Kabbalistic scriptures such as the *Zohar* and the *Bahir*)<sup>401</sup> was prone to unjust threats, vindictive punishments, and contractual agreements in his dealings with humanity, who duels with lesser gods for lordship over humanity, and who had devised a world full of bizarre and unpleasant things and conditions. Because of his limitedness, the Gnostic-Christians deduced that this deity did not create the world *ex nihlio* (“out of nothing”); he had merely formed it into a realm of matter. For this reason, the Gnostics referred to the Creator as the Demiurge (Greek: *Demiurgos*), “the workman” or “half maker.”<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>400</sup> Mead refers to this conception in his discussion on Basilidian Gnosticism in G.R.S. Mead, *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten: Some Short Sketches among the Gnostics, Mainly of the First Two Centuries: A Contribution to the Study of Christian Origins based on the Most Recently Recovered Materials* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1900): 257-258.

<sup>401</sup> Other Gnostic texts that affirm this theological stance surfaced with the Nag Hammadi in 1945, most notably the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, the *Apocryphon of John*, and *On the Origin of the World*. See e.g. Karen King, “Response to ‘Sophia and Christ in the *Apocryphon of John*’” (158-185), Anne McGuire, “Virginity and Subversion: Norea Against the Powers of in the *Hypostasis of the Archons*” (239-264), and Pheme Perkins, “Sophia as Goddess in the Nag Hammadi Codices” (96-112), in Karen King *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1988/2000).

<sup>402</sup> For a detailed discussion of the Demiurge and his descent from the Pleroma, see Steiner, “Die Gnostischen Grundlagen des Vorchristentums: Imagination von Europa; Dornach, 15. Juli 1923,” *Drei Perspektiven der Anthroposophie: Kulturphaenomene, Geisteswissenschaftlich Betrachtet; Zwölf Vorträge, gehalten in Dornach zwischen dem 5. Mai und 23. September 1923* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1990): 116-118. See also Swiney 25-28. In secondary sources, see Stephen E. Flowers, *Fraternitas Saturni—The Brotherhood of Saturn: And Introduction to its History, Philosophy, and Rituals* Third Edition (Smithville, TX: Runa-Raven Press, 2006): 18-21. Karen L. King reiterates the late nineteenth-century understanding of the Demiurge as the cosmic denizen who in Gnostic lore fashions the material realm into existence in her *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003): 87-88; 91; 125. In particular, she discusses Wilhelm Bousser’s, Richard Reitzenstein’s, and Hans Jonas’ scholarly attempts to understand this half-creator in the various contexts of Mandeanism, Valentinianism, and Platonic

Though different ancient Gnostic systems attributed various names to this deity,<sup>403</sup> they held that the Demiurge was the last of many emanations in a primordial pantheon now chiefly lost to human knowledge. While some sects considered the Demiurge synonymous with Jehovah (Hebrew: *YHVH*), the god of the Old Testament, the demiurgic creation of the material universe did not, counter to what has become standard Christian theology, stem from his tender goodwill. Rather, the Creator's formation of the cosmos took place, whether on purpose or by accident, as a consequence of *his* ignorance.<sup>404</sup> But the various sects of Gnosticism all professed that there was indeed a transcendent god, a god beyond the material realm of the Demiurge, who, despite this existence outside space and time, was the true progenitor of humanity. This deity the Gnostics called the "True Father," the "Supreme Being," or the "True God" (Greek: *Ieou*), and considered this Being the same deity taught by Jesus.<sup>405</sup> By entangling itself in matter, humanity had all but separated itself from knowing the True God.

Despite the existence of this deity, the Gnostics claimed that man could never *directly* know this god either in the material world or in the nether regions between various incarnations. Rather than absolute reunion with the True God, humanity's task has become to overcome the flawed creation of the Demiurge and to return to the Pleroma. In turn, the Creator's purpose has become a tireless effort to calculate, categorize, and

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philosophy. In contrast to King, most scholarship on Gnosticism overlooks this essential peculiarity of the Creator as the "half-maker," which becomes important in understanding the complexity behind its cosmic dualism. While the Demiurge is certainly the first and only Creator, this deity cannot be the "Supreme Being" since he emanated from the Pleroma. His material realm is held together by the psychical reality that transcends his own power and the veiled perception of man. Outside the teachings of Marcionism, in ancient times there seem to be no sects of this religious cosmology that took such a fundamentalist approach to Gnosticism. Cf. the misinformed treatment of the Demiurge in Chapter Four of Grimstad, Kirsten J. *The Modern Revival of Gnosticism and Thomas Mann's Doktor Faustus*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2002).

<sup>403</sup> The most common name was the one given by the Orphite and Sethian systems: "Yaldabaoth" (child of chaos). In addition, Gnostic texts often refer to the Demiurge as "Sakla" (foolish one) and even "Samael" (blind god), the latter drawing a direct correlation with the archangel "Hasatan" (the accuser, seducer) of Talmudic lore. See McGuire in King, *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism* 243-244.

<sup>404</sup> Mead, *Fragments* 340; on the ignorance incurred by the flesh, see ibid. 520.

<sup>405</sup> Mead, *Fragments* 533-534.

rule the material realm, and above all to convince the beings within his reach, whether by intimidation or deception, that no greater power exists than he. The Demiurge is not alone in this attempt. His mission has become a scramble to expand his knowledge and reinforce the perception he wills humanity have of him: the only god. Not recognizing the true deific component from which his own creation stems, the Demiurge created Archons (Greek: *Arkhon*), or “rulers,” to act as his cosmic minions to keep humanity ignorant of its true nature and destiny.<sup>406</sup> Anything that causes men and women to remain attached to earthly ambitions serves to keep them enslaved to these lower rulers.

The Demiurge’s designation as the Creator deserves special attention, since this deity’s exact identity became a debated topic among the *fin-de-siècle* inheritors of ancient Gnosticism. Because the Gnostic mythos held that both the Demiurge and Lucifer emanated from the higher realms of the Pleroma, many modern mystics contended that the Demiurge and Lucifer may be considered one in the same. When surveying Gnostic myth, they observed that both the Demiurge and Lucifer are *Aeons*, or “emanations” of the True God. Whereas Archons were the various *creations* intended by the Demiurge to establish and exert influence over earthly rulers in order to regulate mankind, the Aeons were depicted as *emanations* of the True God of the Pleroma, bearing a number of similarities with angels in the Judeo-Christian tradition especially in their role as servants of God, i.e., the Supreme Being. The Gnostics considered the Demiurge himself, by extension through his mother Sophia, an Aeon of the True God.

For this reason, the devious Demiurge was displaced further from the Supreme Being

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<sup>406</sup> Surprisingly, Mead mentions very little of the Archons, or “Watchers.” See his *Fragments* 543-544. For a concise discussion regarding the function of the Archons, see McGuire in King, *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*: esp. 242-250. While the *Hypostasis of the Archons* resurfaced only with the discovery of the Nag Hammadi in 1945, this article contains a thorough outline of the significance of the Archons in Gnostic literature, highlighting nuances and shades of understanding already in the writings of scholars and mystics in *fin-de-siècle* German-speaking Europe.

than the “Light Bearer,” Lucifer. Yet, as far as mankind’s experience of these entities is concerned, both these Aeons came into existence—albeit with entirely different motives and intentions—through progressive degenerations as the outflow of the Pleroma, either by drifting further and further away from their primordial source or by conscious withdrawal of their divine will (Greek: *Thelēma*) from the outer sources. Long supported by heterodox Christian cults such as the Bogomils and the Cathars in medieval Europe and doubly bolstered by the revival of Hellenistic Gnosticism, this conception inspired (apparently) Theodor Reuss in establishing Ordo Templi Orientis, Albin Grau in *Fraternitas Saturni*, and an early founding member of the Anthroposophical Society named Johanna van der Meulen.<sup>407</sup> Invariably, modern epistemologists echoed their medieval predecessors in emphasizing the vindictive aspects of the Creator, reconciling the vindictive character of Jehovah in Kabbalistic and other apocryphal literature with the image of a rebellious archangel Lucifer as the condemned Satan of orthodox Christian canon and tradition.<sup>408</sup>

Thus, modern mystics could comfortably merge the occasionally tyrannical Demiurge and his nemesis Lucifer into a singular mythological entity. The result was ironic, contradictory, and paradoxical all at once. Solely by acting out of the accordance with the Creator Jehovah, Lucifer was hailed in Gnosticism as a hero on the same grounds that orthodox Christianity had come to consider him a fallen angel. But whereas orthodox Christianity taught the supremacy of Jehovah as his self-designation as the one God,

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<sup>407</sup> While further research must go into the original teachings of the O.T.O., many references in Reuss’s writings imply a convergence of the Demiurge and Lucifer into a singular entity. Because F.S. based its authority, which embraced this position, on the authentic doctrines of Reuss, Carl Kellner, and Franz Hartmann (i.e., the teachings preceding Aleister Crowley’s management of the society), there is strong likelihood that this doctrine was propagated in the O.T.O. Flowers 18-19.

<sup>408</sup> See e.g. Steiner’s discussion of the Demiurge and Lucifer in „Die Gnostischen Grundlagen des Vorchristentums,“ *Drei Perspektiven der Anthroposophie* 127-132.

modern mystics resonated the Gnostic argument by indicating that in the Old Testament a great many angels, i.e., Aeons, plunge down onto earth in order to enlighten humanity with knowledge of divination, medicine, and science—all against the will of the Creator and his minions, the Archons.<sup>409</sup> By conflating Lucifer and the Demiurge, then, leaders of esoteric schools seem to have emphasized the human limitations in the comprehension of transcendental knowledge, which in all its manifestations becomes distorted in its descent through higher planes of existence.

But the leaders of these esoteric schools were quick to indicate that, though good and evil exist in sharp contrast to one another, these polarities are, like light and darkness, inextricably codependent on one another in a profound mystic dualism resonating throughout the cosmos. While the wisdom contained in this knowledge transcends human logic and can only fully be envisaged through gnosis, its reconciliation contains insight expedient to the adept seeking higher truths, and especially to the modern initiate. Although at present no information has been found regarding the O.T.O.’s official position on the identification of the Demiurge with Lucifer, there is little doubt that Reuss’s scientific-philosophical interpretations of the alchemical symbolism behind “Gnostic Neo-Christianity” was the leading influence behind Albin Grau’s doctrines in the Pansophical Lodge in 1921, and later in Fraternitas Saturni in 1928. According to the “Saturn-Gnosis” of Fraternitas Saturni, the planet and archetype of Saturnus is the focal

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<sup>409</sup> Because Rosicrucianism recognizes the Supreme Being as the One God of the universe, in his epistemology Heindel sought to reconcile the positive attributes of Old Testament Jehovah in order to portray Him as a bumbling but benevolent deity. Consequently, he associated all negative attributes otherwise associated with the Demiurge instead with Lucifer cum Satan. Still, his understanding of angels as “guardians” and “messengers” of humanity from the supersensible realm beyond the universe reveal his and Rosicrucianism’s Gnostic overtones. See esp. Heindel’s comments on the angels’ role in human evolution in *Cosmo-Conception* 271-291 and *The Message of the Stars* 304-305. See Steiner’s comparison of the lesser gods in Greek and Egyptian paganism and the angels of esoteric Christianity in in Norman Macbeth, trans. “Lecture II: The Reflections of Cosmic Events in the Religious Views of Men; September 3, 1908,” *Egyptian Myths and Mysteries* (Spring Valley, NY: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1971): 12; “The Mystery of Golgotha,” *The Christian Mystery* 48-49, as well as “Christianity Began as a Religion but is Greater than a Religion: May 13, 1908,” *ibid.* 277-278.

point for the manifestation of the Demiurge. This Demiurge is identified with Lucifer, the Light Bearer, as the higher octave of Saturn. In this capacity only, the Demiurge stands as the savior of mankind since he otherwise functions as the “Guardian of the Threshold” (*Hüter der Schwelle*),<sup>410</sup> blocking the initiate’s ascent through the planetary spheres and their access to the firmament and the light.<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> By the early twentieth century, the Guardian of the Threshold (originally the Dweller on the Threshold) had become a popular image embraced in Anthroposophy, Rosicrucianism, Fraternitas Saturni, and possibly the Pansophical Lodge and the O.T.O., among other esoteric schools. This spectral figure originated from the novel *Zanoni* (1842) by the British Rosicrucian and mystic Edward Bulwer-Lytton. Heindel was thoroughly acquainted with Bulwer-Lytton’s literature, including *Zanoni*, and commented often on the Guardian’s significance as a Rosicrucian illustration for the underdeveloped part of the self hindering personal enlightenment and access to higher realms. See Heindel, *The Rosicrucian Philosophy in Questions and Answers*, Third Edition (London: L.N. Fowler, 1922): 135-136, 374-375. In his play *Guardian of the Threshold* from 1912, for example, Steiner also correlated this ominous personage with Lucifer; see the third play in Steiner, H. Collison, et. al., trans., ed. *Four Mystery Plays*. Second Edition (London: The Anthroposophical Publishing Co., 1925). According to Hartmann in 1889: “This Dweller of the Threshold meets us in many shapes. It is the Cerberus guarding the entrance to Hades; the Dragon which St. Michael (spiritual will-power) is going to kill; the Snake which tempted Eve, and whose head will be crushed by the heel of the woman; the Hobgoblin watching the place where the treasure is buried, etc. [...] /The Dweller of the Threshold, the *Dragon* of mediaeval symbolism, is nothing else but our own lower semi-animal, animal or perhaps brutish self, that combination of material and semi-material principles which form the lower *ego*, which the great majority of men blindly and lovingly hug and caress, because they love themselves. Man does not see its true qualities as long as he clings to it, else he would perhaps be disgusted with it; but when he attempts to penetrate within the portals of the paradise of the soul; when his self-consciousness begins to become centered in his higher self, then the Dweller of the Threshold becomes objective to him, and he may be terrified at its (his own) ugliness and deformity.” Hartmann, “The Dweller of the Threshold,” *The Theosophist* 11 (Adyar Pamphlets, 1889): 4-5. It is noteworthy, then, that *Die Nibelungen* Lang and von Harbou split the character Fafner—who appears doubly in the original Germanic myth as an elf and then as a dragon—in two: first as the fire-breathing dragon which Siegfried defeats, bathing in its blood to obtain (though in vain) immortality; secondly as Alberich, the King of the Nibelung elves, who, first seen in the *yoke of a tree*, leads the hero to the underground treasure yet attempts to kill him after luring him into the cave. Lang and von Harbou thus intended Alberich to represent both the Demiurge and Lucifer of the Odenwald. More research is required to ascertain the extent to which Bulwer-Lytton’s “Guardian” and other concepts were known in German-speaking Europe during the first third of the twentieth century, but currently much evidence suggest his mystical archetypes enjoyed great popularity in literary and occult circles well into the 1920s. Particularly relevant here is that mystics like Heindel and Steiner saw many of Bulwer Lytton’s books, such as *Vril: The Power of the Coming Race* (1871), as prophetic accounts regarding the future scientific validation of occult powers within mankind; see e.g. Heindel, “Chapter Nineteen: The Coming Force—Vril or What?” in *The Rosicrucian Christianity Lectures* 309-325. Writing an article 1947, Willy Ley, the rocket engineer who had collaborated with Fritz Lang and Thea von Harbou in the special effects of *Frau im Mond*, made the highly apocryphal claim that a secret “Vril” society had existed in Nazi Germany; see Willy Ley, “Pseudoscience in Naziland,” *Astounding Science Fiction* 39 (May 1947): 90-98. Despite the questionable status of Ley’s claim, there appear to have been many occult-scientific pamphlets published in Weimar Germany embracing Bulwer-Lytton’s concepts; see e.g. Johannes Täufer, „Vril“: *Die Kosmische Urkraft Wiedergeburt von Atlantis* (Berlin: Astrologischer Verlag Wilhelm Becker, 1930), which projects Heindel and Steiner’s interpretations of *Die Nibelungen* regarding the Atlantean Epoch onto the Aryan Epoch, urging Germans to look forward to the next stage of their own psycho-physical evolution through a reinvigoration of electrobiology and astronomy. As this pamphlet suggests, the fantastic themes in Bulwer Lytton’s works are akin to the science fiction genre, and it seems no coincidence that the Paracelsian doctor in *Nosferatu*—written by Henrik Galeen, a Rosicrucian, and designed by Albin Grau, founder of the Pansophical Lodge and the F.S.—is named Prof. *Bulwer*. Indeed, the film *Nosferatu* implies much of the occult symbolism also contained in Bulwer-Lytton’s *Zanoni*.

<sup>411</sup> For the F.S. teaching on the Demiurge-Lucifer under Grau, see Flowers 19-20, 25. According to F.S. teachings, Saturnus is the Great Judge that manifests justice; he also brings reason and intelligence, and governs all standards of weights, measurements, and number. He is Lord of the Seven Dwellings (i.e., the planetary genii of the outer realm), and the governor of the revealed world and lord over life and death, light and darkness. Described as the breaker of

These astrological overtones were not peculiar to Fraternitas Saturni, since other esoteric schools including Anthroposophy likewise integrated occult practices to describe and define the nature of the Demiurge and other Gnostic figures. Because Steiner, however, tended only to encourage the society's members to "connect the spiritual within the individual with the spiritual in the universe," his generally *laissez-faire* agenda allowed many early members, such as Johanna van der Meulen, to embark on self-knowledge exclusively within the esoteric Christian tradition. After her initiation into the society in 1911, van der Meulen began writing philosophical occult treatises which, steeped in a mixture of allegory, mythology, and astrology, laid out the esoteric Christian conception behind the recreation and destiny of the cosmos.<sup>412</sup> Writing under the pseudonym "Intermediarius," in 1914 she published *Christian Theology: Cosmosophy according to the Emblem of the Holy Grail* (*Christliche Theologie: Cosmosofie nach dem Zeichen des Heiligen Graal*). Part of this work details the order of the heavenly bodies in relation to spiritual forces at work throughout the universe, explaining how Lucifer, the creator of the material realm, has stationed certain celestial rulers on the heavenly bodies who, at the bidding of their creator, aim to influence and suppress human beings from seeking self-knowledge beyond the innermost spheres of physical existence.<sup>413</sup>

Assuredly, the distinguishing characteristics between the Demiurge and Lucifer are

cosmic order and unity, Saturnus—not unlike Lucifer in Rosicrucianism and Anthroposophy—instituted death by revealing divine secrets to mankind, resulting in regeneration and change. Also like Lucifer, he was subsequently punished for this task. Thus in F.S. Saturnus is at once identical with both the Serpent in the Garden of Eden and Jehovah.

<sup>412</sup> Little is known about van der Meulen's involvement in the occult and alternative spiritualties outside her literature, which was mostly written after her initiation into the Anthroposophical Society. At present it is only known that in 1909 she transferred her membership from the Dutch to the German section of the Theosophical Society. In addition to her involvement in Anthroposophy, she is said to have been an ardent disciple of Rudolf Steiner. She converted to Catholicism in the 1930s, which should come as no surprise, given the strong parallels between her occult writings and the Catholic tradition in hagiographic and scriptural interpretation. Gerhard Wehr, „Johanna van der Meulen,“ *Forschungsstelle Kulturimpuls: Biographien Dokumentation* (accessed 18 May 2014, URL: [kulturimpuls.org](http://kulturimpuls.org)).

<sup>413</sup> See esp. the discussion of the zodiac, archangels, and their planets in Johanna van der Meulen, *Buch I: Die Weisheitslehre des Heiligen Graal* (München: Herold-Verlag GmbH, 1914/1933): 28-39.

paradoxical and contradictory. The former maintains the ability to create an entire universe yet through his delusion has become ignorant of the yonder spiritual agents whence his power has come, while the latter, though not a creator, has infiltrated the created realm in order to convey knowledge to elect humans. Meanwhile, humans remain the object of both their desires. Collectively, the human species partakes spiritually in the divine spark that comes from the Pleroma—from which both the Demiurge and Lucifer have also emanated *before* and *after* the human species, respectively—while partaking physically in the corporeal state of the material realm—into which both the Demiurge and Lucifer have also descended *before* and *after* humanity, respectively. As both an alien and a native of his environment, man is thus a spirit-flesh hybrid that, upon his recollection of his origins, must transubstantiate itself within the created world. To Grau, van der Meulen, and their fellow initiates, the personalities of Demiurge and Lucifer were, to borrow the metaphor, two sides of the same coin.<sup>414</sup> While the former plunges the consciousness of humanity inward, i.e., into the material realm, the latter elevates the human species outward, i.e., into the spiritual realm. Their agendas were thus viewed as simultaneously complementary *and* antagonistic.

To be sure, many German-speaking mystics at the beginning of the twentieth century

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<sup>414</sup> In no way should this perceived doubled personality of the Demiurge be considered analogous to the Church's teaching on the Trinity, or the three personalities of the one God. Rather, Grau and van der Meulen's conceptions of the Demiurge as Lucifer parallels the Church's interpretation of the fall of Lucifer and one third of the heavenly hosts—considered in her account (as well as in the teachings of other esoteric schools) to include the souls of primeval mankind, not angels alone—from heaven (known as the "War in Heaven"), as well as God's deigning Satan the power to reign over the planet earth after the entrance of sin into the world (II Corinthians 4:4, e.g., refers to Satan as "the god of this age [who] hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them"). See esp. Flowers 25–27. Cf. commentary in W.F. Cobb, *Mysticism and the Creed* (London: McMillian & Co., 1914): 190–191. Although in her *Christian Theology* van der Meulen cites neither books from the Christian Bible (esp. *Isaiah*, *Ezekiel*, and the *Revelation of St. John*) nor "Gnostic" texts like the *Book of Enoch*, the *Apocryphon of John* (also the *Secret Book of John*), and the *Revelation of St. Peter*, all which discuss both the myths of the angelic fall and earthly reign in great detail, she obviously had these or similar sources at her disposal when composing her treatise.

were—in the tradition of the Gnostics—never considered fusing the inconsistencies of the Demiurge and Lucifer into one mythological figure. Instead, to them the Demiurge and Lucifer stood in diametric opposition regarding the enlightenment of mankind. Adepts like Hartmann and Heindel emphasized that because the Creator, like humanity, has become ignorant of the world he has forsaken and likewise yearns to improve his realm, both the ancient and the modern Gnostic conception of his bumbling deity was sophisticated and nuanced.<sup>415</sup> While the Demiurge wants humanity to believe he is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, this celestial author is himself limited in knowledge, power, and presence, especially as he attempts to preside over his unwieldy creation. Although the Demiurge is the most knowledgeable, most powerful, and most eminent being in his constructed reality, he is aware his authority is by no means absolute. After all, humans were—and *still are*, albeit unconsciously—co-creators with the Demiurge.<sup>416</sup> As a consequence, he is frustrated, constantly toiling to gain mastery over the cosmic laws, scientific and moral, by which he fashioned his numinous design.<sup>417</sup>

#### *Technocratic Transliterations*

In many ancient Gnostic myths, the Demiurge seeks at all costs to suppress the knowledge of humanity in order that his might remain superior, since the greater the

<sup>415</sup> See Heindel's differentiation between the God of this world, who is the agent of spiritual willpower, and the Supreme Being, which is the fount of all spiritual power pervading this and all other universes in *Cosmo-Conception* 177-182. The traditional Rosicrucian conception of mankind's hierarchical relation to creation and the Creator, as well as the Creator's emanation (and the emanations of other gods of other solar systems) from the Supreme Being through seven cosmic planes, could not have been derived from any spiritual tradition outside Gnostic thought (See esp. Diagram 6, *ibid.* 178). See also Franz Hartmann, *Magic: Black and White*, 82-83.

<sup>416</sup> See Heindel, *Cosmo-Conception* 128, 338. Steiner, "The Purification of the Blood from the Passion of Selfhood through the Mystery of Golgotha: April 1, 1907, Berlin," *The Christian Mystery* 102-103.

<sup>417</sup> Mead, *Fragments* 247-249.

ignorance of humanity equals the greater power he possesses.<sup>418</sup> The Demiurge is in competition against humanity to decipher knowledge encoded in the laws of the material universe, which itself is merely an emanation from the Supreme Being, the ineffable God of Truth. Because they considered man as no less a product of the material realm than the rest of creation, the Gnostics challenged the Demiurge based not only on the limitedness of this deity but also on the acumen of the human being. If man were wholly a creation of this realm, they reasoned, then he would not be able to detect the imperfections of the universe. Why, in spite of his seemingly absurd surroundings, does man search for justice, order, and harmony when none of these things appear close at hand? Above all, how else could man conceive such ideals, unless he had originated on a plane higher than the one in which he finds himself so alienated, so estranged by his circumstances?

While these quandaries were certainly revived by twentieth-century esoteric schools to address the existential distress indicative of industrial modernism, these same dilemmas bespeak Robert Herne's peculiar high-tech society in Werckmeister's *Algol*. Rapidly developing a powerhouse based on the prototype given him by the inhabitant of the invariable star, Robert develops an electrical device that initially relieves the workers of their toil. But, within six months, his machine also rifts massive economic turmoil throughout the world. Twenty years later power lines connect the entire globe to his

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<sup>418</sup> This is particularly evident throughout the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, the *Acts of Thomas*, and the *Book of Enoch*, to name a few standard Gnostic texts known to lay Europeans by the end of the nineteenth century. But the most significant of these texts was the *Pistis Sophia*. The *Pistis Sophia* was published in German through various translations and scholarly treatises by the middle of the nineteenth century, including Moritz Gotthilf Schwartze's *Pistis Sophia* (1851) and Karl Reinhold Köstlin's *Das gnostische System des Buches Pistis Sophia* (1854). But the most accessible translations were produced by the turn of the century, including a particularly popular version by Carl Schmidt in 1905 (Hanegraaff 417-418). While no contemporary German-language translation is available in the U.S., see e.g. G.R.S. Mead, ed. *Pistis Sophia: A Gnostic Gospel (with Extracts from the Books of the Savior Appended)* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1896). Because this text is exceedingly lengthy, all references to its content will be pulled from the summary in Frances Swiney, *The Esoteric Teachings of the Gnostics* (London: Yellon, Williams & Co., 1909).

“Bios-Works,” the mysterious powerhouse whose inexhaustible energy source Robert conceals with jealousy and suspicion. But while his innovation has made coal mining obsolete, Robert has abandoned Maria for the sake of his entrepreneurial endeavors and altogether forgotten his lowly origins as a foreman in the coalmines. Similarly, the frequency of the vital force powering his company proves unpredictable, occasionally resulting in the electrocution of his workers. When the coal reserves in his home country are depleted, Robert exploits the situation by instituting a fifteen-hour workday in his factories as world leaders, manufacturers, and businessmen rally to purchase electricity and stock from his company in unprecedented numbers.

In his pursuit of wealth and control, Robert Herne has grown blind to the reality that he has betrayed his former comrades and become a greater tyrant than the system he set out to eliminate with the power of the mysterious Algol-Machine. Robert’s fraudulent display of power and his mystical acquisition of knowledge bear uncanny resemblance to the constructed reality of the Gnostic Demiurge. Oppressing his workers with the very technology whose mysterious powers enabled his own success, Robert now seeks only to expand his influence, eliminate competitors, and build greater cities at the expense of the people who once celebrated his magnificent discovery as an end to their daily plight. The workers, symbolic of humanity in the material realm of pain and suffering, labor only to benefit of their supposedly just progenitor, ignorant both of the source of his power and of the chance to freedom their former empress intended to offer them.

But Robert’s greatest secret is that he did not in fact invent this power source. While he is responsible for amplifying the Eternal Force that has made possible the impressive cityscapes and great luxuries wrought from this peculiar technology, the “life” behind the

*Bios-Works* is not Robert's invention at all. His covert ability to harness the mystic rays of Algol into storable energy was actually a discovery of the long departed Dr. Crane—known to Robert only through the dubious intervention of the alien figure from the planet of the same name. Yet this fleeting reference to the true inventor of the machine might be understood as a representation of the True God in Gnosticism, the unknown deity from whose glory the humanity of this world has been displaced in material mindedness. Likewise, in his audacious effort to master the mysterious dangers of the Algol-Machine, Robert represents the Demiurge who attempts to create a perfect and immortal realm. He is half charlatan, half maker, the hoarder of arcane knowledge, and the suppressor of those who challenge his might. The death of his wife, Leonore, at the Algol-Machine implicitly affirms his secret pact with the alien as much as it lunges him explicitly towards invariable madness.

In addition to the premise of *Algol*, the concept of the Gnostic Demiurge is reflected in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. In fact, Thea von Harbou's script for this film, and even some of Lang's visuals, seem to be directly lifted from Hans Brennert and Fridel Köhne original screenplay in depicting the Demiurge (e.g. Fig. 4.1 & 4.2).<sup>419</sup> Regardless these similarities, in the making of *Metropolis* Lang and von Harbou were as indebted as their predecessors to the Gnostic myths of the Demiurge. But whereas Brennert and Köhne gave this theme a new twist by adapting the story of an alienated worker's transformation into the celestial oppressor, von Harbou was much more faithful to the conventional Gnostic symbolism as a figure symbolically other to the workers he supervises. While in both her script and her novel von Harbou depicts this mythical industrial civilization as

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<sup>419</sup> Another notable example from both films includes the workers' revolt. After Algol and Rotwang, both 'working' through the medium of technology, the workers crush the machines and dance hand-in-hand around them in a childlike fashion. There are numerous other examples that are too obvious for explanation.

consisting of many classes, emphasis is put on the polar opposites in the social stratum: the elites under the “Head”—the executives, engineers, and inventors—and the sprawling masses that constitute the “Hands”—or manual laborers.

Brennert, Köhne, and von Harbou charged their scripts with various hints, both visually and linguistically to reference that their mighty industrialists were modern transliterations of the primordial Demiurge. In *Algol*, shortly after his ascension to power, not only does Robert do everything to forget his past in the mines, he also adopts the title *Herr der Welt*. While this title might be understood as “master of the world,” it contains the double reading as “lord of the world,” a phrase evocative of Yahweh in the Christian Old Testament. When composing the screenplay for Lang’s film some five years later, von Harbou was more direct in her portrayal of Joh Fredersen (Alfred Abel), “the Master of Metropolis” (*der Herr über Metropolis*), as the Gnostic Demiurge. His first name is an abbreviated form of “Jehovah,” which, more commonly than Yahweh, was a Gnostic designation for the bogus creator god.<sup>420</sup> Evocative of William Blake’s Urizen in “The Ancient of Days,”<sup>421</sup> Fredersen embodies conventional reason and law which he exercises, quite literally with compass in hand, to ensnare and punish his children for not fulfilling his most intricate demands (Fig. 4.3 & 4.4).

But if von Harbou incorporated into her script more explicit references to the Demiurge, then her husband’s signature penchant to themes of surveillance and

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<sup>420</sup> Numerous scholars have made this observation. See esp. Alan Williams also made this observation in his article “Structures of Narrativity in Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*,” *Film Quarterly* 27 (Summer 1974): 22; and Tom Gunning, who acknowledges its Gnostic overtones in his *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity* (London: British Film Institute, 2000): 71.

<sup>421</sup> While to my knowledge no historians have correlated Lang and von Harbou’s films and Blake’s paintings, the latter definitely seems to have had an impression on the former in this and other films. For example, the self-induced trance of the character Prof. Baum in *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse* (1933) very much resonates with the wide-eyed mystics and seers of Blake’s artwork. After all, scholars have long demonstrated that many of Lang’s visuals were inspired by nineteenth-century artists; see esp. Lotta H. Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1952/1973).

espionage further contributed to the modernized mythos of the Gnostic imposter God. With technological devices and undercover henchmen at his control, Fredersen has enabled himself to convince the citizens of Metropolis that he is in absolute control. Lang and von Harbou's film is driven by the many ways which Fredersen uses indirect means to pursue Freder and his cohorts through his henchman "Slim" (Fritz Rasp); Grot (Heinrich George), the foreman of the workers; the conniving Rotwang; and a parade of futuristic devices, viz. the Machine Man (Brigitte Helm). In Brennert and Köhne's screenplay, the role of Archons is notably subtler but no less prominent in the many envoys who constantly relay telegrams and messages between Robert and Maria, his son Reginald, and the various diplomats in neighboring countries. The alien Algol, synonymous with his evil star, plays a role almost explicitly identifying him as an Archon of Gnostic lore. While none can be traced definitively to any particular Archon in Gnostic mythology, these characters clearly represent extensions of demiurgic power.<sup>422</sup> In both films, these motifs underscore the estrangement between the technocrat and the world around him, as well as the ironically insulated lifestyle of an autocratic ruler.

While in *Algol* Brennert and Köhne's storyline maintained a clear line between Robert and Algol's respective roles as Demiurge and Lucifer, in her plotline for *Metropolis* von Harbou lent poetic expression to the Gnostic dynamic between the Demiurge and Lucifer as well as the contested mixture of characteristics they shared with regard to mankind while simultaneously underscoring the dual nature of the Demiurge as tyrant and liberator which many twentieth-century mystics had come to embrace. At the center of this

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<sup>422</sup> Further research must investigate to what extent this assertion can be made with certainty. Only a more thorough discussion can show how particular characters definitely reflect particular occult teachings regarding Gnostic Archons and antagonists. A few examples include Rotwang and Algol's similarities to the demiurgic Saturn, as well as the seductive Machine Man's creation and its uncanny relation to the account of Lilith in the *Zohar* and the *Alphabet of Ben-Sira*.

symbiosis stands technology, which, in addition to the salvific muse of the protagonists in Weimar science fiction, doubly serves in von Harbou's novel and screenplay as a seduction under whose wiles man must not succumb. To be dazzled by technology in *Metropolis* parallels the Gnostic admonition to fall subject to earthly existence, betraying one's *anamnesis* and its challenge to discover one's true freewill, indeed one's destiny. Von Harbou's symbol for this esoteric challenge to master technology is the Machine Man, which mocks and emulates, seduces and instigates mankind into the denial of this freewill, into psychophysical degeneration, and into his own self-destructive damnation.<sup>423</sup>

In *Algol*, Robert allows himself to be seduced by the "eternal power" of magical technology, degenerating from an obviously Christ-like figure to an angry, jealous ruler evocative of Jehovah. As the next chapter will elucidate, there is much astrological symbolism in Robert's allegorical failure to achieve his utopian mission. From the pure

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<sup>423</sup> The leaders of esoteric schools were aware how modern mankind's technology helped undermine his true self-conception of the spiritual faculties integral to the human existence. Steiner discussed the eighteenth-century French physician and philosopher Julien Offray de La Mettrie's theory attempt to frame the human being solely in terms of mechanistic, deterministic processes. Steiner saw de La Mettrie's conception, first published in his book *Man as Machine* in the mid eighteenth century, as the first thorough effort to equate man with machine, an effort which, while originally met with ambivalence by de la Mettrie's contemporaries, had since spread into the intellectual milieu of England and Central Europe to such an extent that other scholars including Charles François Dupuis, Charles Darwin, and Ludwig Feuerbach freely propounded their theories with only considering mankind's external, not internal, perception of the senses. Contrary to the materialist's assumptions, Steiner added, these supposedly ultra-rationalist theories almost always, unbeknownst to their discoverers, concurred with the mystic *Weltanschauung* revealed through clairvoyance and occult doctrine. Thus, while originally de La Mettrie's "efforts were made to understand man through the power of knowledge he himself manifests," by the nineteenth century these conceptions were misguided until mankind "was seen only from outside and his inner nature was not reached. Only the sheath around man was there. This sheath does stand at the summit of the animal world. But what this sheath surrounds comes from quite different worlds into which there was no longer any insight, because all that remained was the sense-perception into which the ancient clairvoyance had developed, and the mathematics and mechanics into which the old spiritual science of astronomy had developed. Through the science arising from within, man could only be conceived of as a machine; and with the science relating to the external world, man could not be conceived at all, but only his sheath. Nor is there any realization today of the extent to which the human being himself has been lost. Men study the anatomy and physiology of the animals and with certain modifications transfer this knowledge to the human being. But in the modern striving for knowledge there is no real understanding of the human being. From science – the highest authority recognized today – no conscious understanding of the human being is to be gained. Man as machine, comprehension of the material world in which the human being is not to be found – these have been the forerunners of our scientific mentality." Steiner, Anonymous, trans. "Lecture IV: Search for the New Isis; Dornach, 26 Dec. 1920," *The Search for the New Isis: Divine Sophia; Dornach, Dec. 23-26, 1920*. Third Edition (Spring Valley, NY: Mercury Press, 1983/1994): 55-56, 57-58.

perspective of Gnostic narrative, Robert represents the good-meaning Demiurge who, wandering beyond the farthest reaches of the Pleroma, hoped to conjure an altogether beautiful creation in his image but soon became egotistical and self-serving in its construction. This observation is backed by Werckmeister's subtle aesthetic emphasis on contrasts of light and darkness. Up to the point in the drama where Robert establishes his Bios-Works, the *mise en scène* becomes increasingly brighter and filled with light. In contrast, after Robert resolves publically to use the Bios-Works to aggrandize himself, the *mise-en-scène* descends steadily into darkness.<sup>424</sup> Fulfilling the script's talk of the purportedly salvific rays of Algol, Werckmeister employed this visual rhythm to form the central basic structure of Robert's rise and fall in a classically Gnostic fashion. But what happened to the Demiurge can also, will also, and has also occurred in mankind.

Similar to the tragedy in *Algol*, the seduction of technology in *Metropolis* symbolizes the Gnostic theme of humanity's entanglement in matter, its compromised freewill for the sake of carnal pleasures, and the subsequent forgetfulness of its primal birthright as the Sons of God. This seduction is thus epitomized in Rotwang's Machine Man. The robotic phantasmagorias von Harbou envisioned in her futuristic plotline had already been presaged in the writings of Heindel, who in 1909 observed:

Had man remained a God-guided automaton he would have known no sickness, pain, nor death unto this day; but he would have also lacked the brain-consciousness and independence which resulted from his enlightenment by the Lucifer Spirits, the 'light-givers,' who opened the eyes of his understanding and taught him to use his then dim vision to gain knowledge of the Physical World which he was destined to conquer.<sup>425</sup>

Thus the spiritual challenge to modern mankind. By depicting Fredersen's demand that

<sup>424</sup> A similar observation has been made in Dietrich Neumann, "Algol: Eine deutsche Parabel," in Walter Schobert and Hans-Peter Reichmann, ed. *Walter Reimann: Maler und Filmarchitekt* (Frankfurt am Main: Deutsches Filmmuseum, 1997): 77-78.

<sup>425</sup> Heindel, *Cosmo-Conception* 288.

Rotwang ‘program’ the Machine Man to instigate a staged revolt among the workers in order that he may suppress the uprising, as well as the pleasure district Yoshiwara, she transliterated the mythic Demiurge’s wish to deter humanity’s freewill away from authentic self-knowledge.<sup>426</sup> Likewise, she played on Lucifer’s covert desire to subvert the Creator’s plan to exert power over mankind in depicting Rotwang’s contrivance to turn the entire city against Fredersen. Yet it is the luciferic Rotwang who wishes to end the life of Fredersen’s son by commanding the Machine Man, in the false image of Maria, to drive the workers and executives of the city toward unbridled emotions and sensuality; meanwhile, the demiurgic Fredersen desires (particularly in the novel) only to groom his son as the future savior of the workers, to save the workers from the machine-men they have already become through the grueling alienation of industrial oppression.

Ultimately, von Harbou utilized the icon of the Machine Man—or rather, the inventor’s impetus behind this mechanical assimilation of life—to clarify the characterological fission between Fredersen and Rotwang as Demiurge and Lucifer, respectively. In both her novel and screenplay, Rotwang’s emergence into the drama quickly reveals him to be a long-time rival of Joh Fredersen. While waiting for his host in the mysterious old house, Fredersen discovers behind a curtain an enormous marble bust of beautiful woman. Its likeness is that of Fredersen’s deceased wife, Hel. The Master of Metropolis is visually sorrowful upon reading the epitaph on the base:

HEL  
BORN

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<sup>426</sup> There is, however, an ambivalence in von Harbou’s book’s portrayal of Fredersen and Rotwang in their relation to the Machine Man and Yoshiwara, both which in the film become integral to the downfall of Metropolis. In it, Fredersen views Yoshiwara with almost as much contempt as the city’s medieval cathedral, since, just as the Machine Man’s call to rebellion wreaks havoc among the workers, the illicit activities of the red-light district deter the white-collar workers from their performance. In the film, Fredersen’s response to Yoshiwara appears ignorant, or at most apathetic.

UNTO ME AS A FORTUNE, UNTO ALL MANKIND AS A BLESSING.  
 LOST  
 TO JOH FREDERSEN.  
 DIED  
 AS SHE GAVE LIFE TO FREDER, JOH FREDERSEN'S SON.<sup>427</sup>

Storming onto the scene, Rotwang clasps the curtain shut and berates his rival. The wilder Rotwang becomes, the calmer Fredersen becomes, saying: “A brain like yours, Rotwang, should be able to forget....”<sup>428</sup> Manically the inventor waves his mechanical hand, shouting: “Only one time in my life have I forgotten something: That Hel was a woman, and you a man....”<sup>429</sup> When the technocrat solemnly advises his host to “let the dead rest,”<sup>430</sup> Rotwang replies all the more vigorously: “For me she has not died, Joh Fredersen – *for me, she lives – –!*”<sup>431</sup> Smugly, Rotwang ejaculates, “Would you like to see her?!”<sup>432</sup> and leads his guest upstairs to his laboratory, where, behind another curtain, sits the Machine Man. Through visual presentation of the robot and the bust, Lang insinuates a connection which von Harbou made clear in her novel: the deceased Hel and Machine Man (and in fact, *all* the machines) are enshrined idols of the men who vie to control Metropolis, demanding homage from their creators. The “light bearing” Rotwang, then, reveals himself to have brought the life force from beyond the symbolic Pleroma to mortals, but in turn has become infatuated with it, cofounding his will with Fredersen, the Demiurge.

Indeed, von Harbou’s decision to overlap the oppositional agendas of Rotwang and Fredersen through the Machine Man evoke the penchant of *fin-de-siècle* mystics to merge

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<sup>427</sup> Original: „HEL, /GEBOREN MIR ZUM GLÜCK, ALLEN MENSCHEN ZUM SEGEN. /VERLOREN AN JOH FREDERSEN. /GESTORBEN, ALS SIE FREDER, JOH FREDERSENS SOHN, DAS LEBEN SCHENKTE.“ For the parallel account in the novel, see von Harbou, *Metropolis* 76.

<sup>428</sup> Original: „Ein Hirn wie das Deine, Rotwang, müsste vergessen können....“

<sup>429</sup> Original: „Ich habe ein einziges Mal im Leben etwas vergessen: Dass Hel ein Weib war und Du ein Mann....“

<sup>430</sup> Original: „Lass die Töten ruhen [...].“

<sup>431</sup> Original: „Mir ist sie nicht gestorben, Joh Fredersen, – *mir lebt sie – –!*“

<sup>432</sup> Original: „Willst Du sie sehen – ?!“

the Gnostic images of the Demiurge and Lucifer in the attempt to portray a Creator who is both well-meaning yet vindictive, benevolent yet restrictive. At the same time, by dividing the personalities of the Semitic Rotwang and the European Fredersen, the screenwriter was able to project onto the inventor the immorality, degeneration, and parasitism which contemporary culture associated with the cosmopolitan, capitalist Jew. Yet these negative characteristics simultaneously reflect theosophical associations transcendent of Weimar culture, viz. the involution of the straggling race of Lucifer spirits. As a result, the executive Fredersen, a narrative representation of Weimar liberalism and free trade, becomes the good-meaning European business partner to the backward, otherwise shunned counterpart. It is Fredersen's unwitting susceptibility to the subversive wiles of Rotwang that lend him the sympathy needed to represent symbolically all the admirable aspects of the Demiurge.

This penchant to overlap, if not entirely conflate, the Gnostic images of the Demiurge and Lucifer was quite common in the cinematic collaborations of Fritz Lang and Thea von Harbou. In *Dr. Mabuse: Der Spieler* (1922), the couple presented the story of a master criminal with the aim to destroy the very foundation of postwar German society. A psychiatrist steeped in hypnotism and mass suggestion—most which he executes with Chinese cues and claims to have learned from Hindu mystics—Mabuse is a power-hungry criminal, the mirror image of the degenerate postwar Berlin and the Weimar Republic. He manipulates the commodities of the market, runs a counterfeiting ring, and uses telepathic powers to coerce others to carry out his bidding. Not even the shrewd Norbert von Wenk, the city's Chief Inspector (the representative of true law and order), can initially withstand the spell of his powerful gaze. Similar to Alberich in *Die*

*Nibelungen*,<sup>433</sup> Dr. Mabuse plays the aloof commander as well as the hoarder of mystical wisdom and hidden treasures, thus seducing and en chaining those he might lure into his web of crime.

In *Dr. Mabuse*, the image of Weimar society is Gnostic to the core, depicting Berlin as thoroughly rotten—because it is materialistic, and because its citizens’ knowledge of proper societal order has been corrupted. While in *Dr. Mabuse* the psychiatrist presents the first evidence of Lang’s interest in mixing modern technology with occult knowledge as an elaborate apparatus of surveillance and control, von Harbou’s novel and screenplay for *Metropolis* splits these associations of scientific and occult influence between Fredersen and Rotwang, respectively. But even then, the demarcations between these irreconcilable forces become increasingly overlapped and vague when the state—as in *Algol* and *Dr. Mabuse*—eventually spirals out of control and devours its citizens. In Lang’s later films, like *Metropolis*, this interest would develop into plots in which series of innocent people are destroyed by their encounter with a sinister state apparatus that should provide them justice, but does not, even when they have truth on their side.<sup>434</sup> In *Dr. Mabuse* as in *Metropolis* and *Algol*, the confused citizen trapped in an alluring yet hostile and alienating state influenced by both the occult and technology evokes Gnosticism’s basic *imago hominis*. Thus in various ways German Expressionist cinema translated the prophetic angst of *fin-de-siècle* mystics into post-apocalyptic visions that mirrored the very real-life disillusionment with economic liberalism, social

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<sup>433</sup> Compare again Alberich’s role in Lang and von Harbou’s screenplay and visuals in *Die Nibelungen* with Hartmann’s comments on the “Guardian of the Threshold.”

<sup>434</sup> A similar observation is made in R. Bruce Elder’s article “Gnostic Lang,” in Robert Haller, ed. *Fritz Lang 2000*. New York, NY: Anthology Film Archives, 2000: 52.

progressivism, and state bureaucracy.<sup>435</sup>

### FORCES OF LIGHT

In the years immediately following the Great War, Anthroposophy, Rosicrucianism, the O.T.O., and other esoteric schools and occult societies like the Pansophical Lodge and Fraternitas Saturni began teaching that their initiations proffered for the neophyte an experiential salvation not simply for all humanity but one uniquely engineered to help overcome the ennui and banality of the postwar industrial environment. Similar to the Gnostics, the German-speaking mystics during the early twentieth century taught a concept of salvation counter to the traditional Judeo-Christian concept of liberation from sin. Instead, they taught the liberation from suffering which, as postwar society realized, is an integral part of the human condition. To them, this form of suffering signified the existential condition of unconscious existence in an unconscious world, the plunging of Western civilization further into material thought and lifestyle until, finally, the spiritual forces avenged themselves on mankind. From such suffering Heindel, Reuss, Steiner and their followers wished to be redeemed, evoking the doctrines of Hellenistic Gnosticism in their profession that to be a good man is a greater challenge than to be a god.

If the modern West had set itself on a course for self-destruction, then in the midst of

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<sup>435</sup> Note that, during the Weimar era, the various ills associated with Germany's loss of the Great War were heaped upon the Jewish population; hence, the conditions of the new government were often disparaged as the "Judenrepublik." Again, there seems to be an aesthetic correlation between the implicit xenophobia in these fantasy films—particularly *Algol* and *Metropolis*, but also non-science fictions like Grau's *Nosferatu* and *Schatten*—and the Antisemitism within the widespread rejection of the Weimar Republic. Of course, as mentioned in the previous chapter, this correlation should not be assumed as a direct reflection of the screenwriters and directors' racism, since many of them were intimately involved with, and in some cases *were*, Jewish. Instead, this racialist leitmotif appears to be linked with—in addition to an occidental fascination with the Orient, the occult, and the arcane—the Gnostic mythological character of the Aeon Lucifer, the "Bringer of Light" who comes from the East to impart *gnosis* to mankind. Further research must investigate the obviously complex boundaries and demarcations between allegorical symbolism and downright literalistic racism in these films of the fantastic, which always attempt to translate into the familiar (i.e., contemporary cultural, social, and political dimensions) that which is abstract (i.e., the firsthand experience of *gnosis*).

the Great War its technologically driven civilization became a machine for unprecedented carnage and widespread desperation all the more redolent of the apocalypticism in Gnostic literature, an industrial cataclysm whose spiritual aftershock is evident in *Algol* and *Metropolis*. Having objected to world war since before its outbreak in 1914, in the years immediately following defeat the leaders of German-speaking Europe's esoteric schools and occult societies looked to the mass disillusionment in positivist science and religion as a chance for soteriological redemption. As early as 1907, Steiner had prophesied a "war of all against all,"<sup>436</sup> stating:

Our age must give birth not merely to an ancient wisdom, but to a *new wisdom*, a wisdom which points not only to the past, but which must work prophetically – apocalyptically – into the future. In the mysteries of past ages of civilization we see an ancient wisdom preserved, but our wisdom must be an apocalyptic wisdom, the seed for which must be sown by us. Once again we have need of a principle of initiation so that the primeval connection with spiritual worlds may be renewed.<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>436</sup> Steiner, Christopher Bamford, et. al., trans. "The Promise of the Spirit of Truth: March 8, 1907, Cologne," *The Christian Mystery: Lectures* (Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1998): 64-65; "Schools for Adepts in the Past: The Mysteries of the Spirit, the Son, and the Father; March 7, 1907, Düsseldorf," *ibid.* 179. Though Steiner made oblique references to this future war, one driven wholly by high-tech machinery, he was apparently referring not to the upcoming Great War but instead to a still greater apocalyptic tragedy that would lay the ground for mankind's turn away from crude materialism and toward his psychical sensibilities.

<sup>437</sup> Steiner continued: "The task of the Anthroposophical movement is to supply this principle. No wonder that wisdom has been lost to so many, for without the principle of initiation it is very difficult nowadays to obtain wisdom, more difficult than formerly, when the memory of ancient experiences had only to be refreshed, and when the results of earlier development could be brought to the consciousness of man. Today this is difficult; therefore we can understand that the sense-world seems to be without a God, and to be barren and empty; but although it appears as if the ancient spirit-world had died out, it is there; it is working and fructifying, and if man wills he can find connection with the spiritual world./ Care was taken, precisely at the moment when the ancient memories seemed to be disappearing during the Greco-Latin age, that a wonderful new seed for all future time should be laid within the cold ground of the earth; this seed is what we describe as the Christ-Principle. The apocalyptic wisdom, the true new Spiritual Wisdom, will be found in conjunction with this Christ Principle, which does not point back only to memories of past epochs, but prophetically to the future, and precisely through this it summons man to action, to creative work. This productive wisdom has sprung freely from seed that was sown in the past. So we see a far horizon of the future rise before us when we speak of Universe, Earth, and Man. In what follows we shall have to speak not merely of the past, but also of the *forces of the future*. The world is not merely concerned with what is past, it evolves towards the future, and our epoch has still a long period to pass through before it comes to an end. Man will, however, live on after the earth has disappeared, and, if we are to know him completely, we must look not to the past alone, but must study what is active today, and what will go on working into the great tomorrow of the world." Steiner, anonymous, trans. "Ancient Wisdom And The New Apocalyptic Wisdom: Temple Sleep, Isis And The Madonna, Past Stages Of Evolution, The Bestowing Of The Ego, Future Powers; 5 August 1908," *Universe, Earth, and Man: in their Relationship to Egyptian Myths and Modern Civilization; eleven lectures given in Stuttgart between 4 and 16 August 1908* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1987): 35-36. Further investigation must go into this particular source, since its lectures appear highly relevant to the heterodox countercultural trend to link ancient spiritualties with the experience of industrial

When facing the postwar environment, Steiner, Heindel, and Reuss disparaged the cruelty of George Clemenceau and Lloyd George, praised the efforts of President Woodrow Wilson, and bemoaned the persecution of Germany, Austria, and Hungary, while all calling for universal brotherhood, the demolition of capitalism, and the reinvigoration of the public's intrigue in occult research and heterodox spiritualities akin to Gnosticism.<sup>438</sup> Not only do these themes explicitly find their way into the narratives of *Algol* and *Metropolis*, their implementation and their underlying plots signify the filmmakers behind them referenced the deeper esoteric truths behind the pithy illustrations and lofty goals of these strange organizations.

### *The Two Sophias & the Christos*

According to Gnostic tradition, the reign of the forces of darkness on the earthly plane is

modernism.

<sup>438</sup> See e.g. Steiner, "Lecture VI: The New Spirituality; Dornach, 8 October 1917," *The Fall of the Spirits of Darkness* 87-101; and Heindel, *Cosmo-Conception* 383-393. In the introduction to a most verbose article in 1920, Reuss stated that the O.T.O.'s postwar mission was quite literally to take over the religious-scientific worldview of Western civilization: „Die vom Weltkrieg gegeißelte Menschheit bedarf eines neuen Glaubens, eines neuen Christentums und einer darauf aufgebauten neuen Zivilisation. /Dass die vielgepriesene europäische Zivilisation und die christliche Kirche nicht im Stande waren, die Grausamkeiten dieses Weltkrieges, noch die Raubsucht und den Hass des diesen Weltkrieg beenden sollenden Friedens zu verhindern, das allein ist Beweis genug dafür, dass das herrschende Christentum und die aus ihr hervorgegangene moderne Zivilisation nicht mehr lebensfähig sind und durch ein neues Christentum und eine neue Zivilisation ersetzt werden müssen. /Die Menschheit verlangt aber auch einen neuen Glauben. Denn der alte Gottesglaube, der aus den von den Kirchenvätern zusammengebrachten christlichen Lehren floss, ist für die überwiegende Mehrheit der Mitglieder der christlichen Kirche längst ein Märchen geworden, weil er der ätzenden Kritik der modernen Wissenschaft nicht Stand halten konnte. Und den Glauben an die Menschheit (Brüderlichkeits-Glaube) den hat besonders der Versailler Frieden gründlich zerstört, und zwar in viel größerem Masse, als die Kriegsergebnisse selbst. Denn die Macher des Versailler Friedens hatten die Völker Amerikas und Europas mit der Devise: Für Freiheit und Menschlichkeit, für Recht und Gerechtigkeit zu einem Kreuzzug gegen den Imperialismus der deutschen Barbaren ins Feld gelockt. Und am Ende benützten die Herren Clemenceau und Lloyd George die Leichtgläubigkeit des deutschen Michels, der, vertraut auf die gleißnerischen und verräterischen Verheißenungen der Ententeführer, dass nicht das deutsche Volk, sondern nur der kaiserliche Imperialismus der Hohenzollern vernichtet werden sollte, im Widerstand und Kampf schließlich nachgab, um auf dem betrogenen versklavten deutschen Volke den anglo-französischen Welt-Imperialismus aufzurichten. /Zu ihrem eigenen Unheil vernichteten die Clemenceau und Lloyd George aber auch bei ihren Verbündeten den Glauben an Menschlichkeit und Brüderlichkeit durch ihr Versailler Machwerk, so dass Millionen von Menschen, bei Siegern und Besiegten gleichmäßig, den Glauben an Gott und Menschen verloren haben. /Die Gemeinschaft der Gnostischen Templer oder Neo-Christen, abgekürzt O.T.O. genannt, welche schon vor dem Kriege in Amerika, Holland, Böhmen, Frankreich, Russland, Italien usw. zahlreiche Anhänger besaß, tritt nun aus ihrer bisherigen Zurückhaltung hervor, um den gepeinigten Menschen die neue Heilsbotschaft der Gnostischen Christen zu verkünden, und der aus derselben entspringenden neuen Zivilisation.“ Theodor Reuss, ed. Peter-Robert Koenig. *Der Kleine Theodor-Reuss-Reader* (München: P.R. Koenig 1993): 77-78. Of course, immediately before this introduction Reuss included the disclaimer: „Achtung: Vorstehendes Aufbau-Programm kann nur auf dem Wege der friedlichen, sozialen Entwicklung verwirklicht werden und niemals durch eine gewaltsame Revolution.“

inevitable, in fact necessary, for human development. Besides having fallen into matter, which itself came about through the creative forces unknown to the outer phases of spiritual emanation, humanity has embarked on this sojourn in order to transubstantiate itself to a state of consciousness higher than that of its oceanic psychic unity in the primal Pleroma. To have been eternally begotten in spiritual realms is one experience of one's own intrinsic divinity, but to reawaken to one's transcendent self in the bleak midst of an absurd, temporal realm is a far nobler achievement. An accomplishment exceeding yet enveloping the icy calculations of human logic, the individual's intuited reconciliation of his *amplified* spiritual individuality with his *condensed* material existence merits the liberation of the corporeal and the psychical, the microcosmic and macrocosmic, the outer and inner modes of reality.<sup>439</sup> The forces of spiritual liberation that lead the individual up from his entanglement in matter were considered messengers of light, the Aeons.

Anthroposophy, Rosicrucianism, Ordo Templi Orientis, and other esoteric schools fashioned their doctrines after this worldview, claiming to aid each initiate along his personal path toward greater individuation and a conscious acquisition of divine wisdom, assisting him to higher levels of existence and thus leading him to individuated godhood. Their approaches to this goal were diverse, but their general prescription was the same: to practice strict self-discipline and so prepare oneself for the aid from spiritual agents. The first of these agents, Lucifer, signified mankind's awakening to the repressive existence of the Demiurge's material realm. Moreover, these schools taught that there coexists

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<sup>439</sup> Steiner, "Ancient Wisdom And The New Apocalyptic Wisdom," *Universe, Earth, and Man* 33-34. See also Steiner's discussion of the seventh step of Rosicrucian initiation dealing with the microcosm and the macrocosm in "The Yoga Path, Christian Gnostic Initiation, and the Esotericism of the Rosicrucians: November 30, 1906, Cologne," *The Christian Mystery* 143-144.

beyond the scope of modern mankind's ordinary perception a spiritual reality not unlike the Pleroma described in ancient Gnosticism.<sup>440</sup> Teaching that initiatory salvation came from beyond the cognitive and sensual modes of human experience (analogous to the physical realm of the Demiurge), these schools noted that the unfoldment of this salvation, though began by Lucifer, continues with Christ. Yet this Christ principle, known more commonly as the Christos, never functions independently of His helpmate, Sophia, who—in sects of ancient Gnosticism as well as the esoteric schools—appears as His Mother, His Sister, and His Companion.<sup>441</sup>

In order to understand the relationship between the Christos and Sophia, one must understand what took place before the Demiurge rebelled against the static, established cosmic order and set into motion the forces of matter, change, and, later, evolution—and consequently death and destruction. Like Arthur Drews, Andrzej Niemojewski, and other scholars involved in comparative religions at the time, Heindel, Reuss, Steiner, and their contemporaries observed that the central motif of the Gnostic cosmological accounts contain variations of the Sophia myth, finding profound parallels in the Hellenistic mystery religions and what has become Christianity.<sup>442</sup> The part concerning the creation of the cosmos and mankind tells how Elder Sophia, the feminine aspect of the Supreme

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<sup>440</sup> Steiner, „Die Gnostischen Grundlagen,“ *Drei Perspektiven* 120-122.

<sup>441</sup> A brief discussion of the Sophia mythos and the mother-daughter relation can be found in Mead *Fragments* 333-334. As for a comprehensive account of the mythological variants of the Christos-Sophia relationship, which are covered in this section, see *ibid.* 335-357. Rather than citing Mead's version at length, below references will be limited largely to the pithy synopsis of the Christos-Sophia mythos found in Swiney's *The Esoteric Teachings of the Gnostics*.

<sup>442</sup> See commentary on Reuss in Hugh B. Urban, *Magia Sexualis: Sex, Magic, and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006): esp. 102-103. See also Steiner's discussion of ancient Gnostic initiation as encoded in Christian myth in “John's Gospel: February 3, 1907, Heidelberg,” *The Christian Mystery* 249-260, esp. 257. None of Heindel's works discusses esoteric Christianity's original initiation ceremonies than *Ancient and Modern Initiation: & Freemasonry and Catholicism* (London: The Rosicrucian Fellowship, 1931).

Being, *emanated*<sup>443</sup> into existence Younger Sophia as well as her syzygy (or paired Aeon), the Christos. Gazing into the farthest stretches of the Pleroma, Younger Sophia saw reflected there a transcendent light, which she mistook for true light itself. Drawn by desire to possess this light and duplicate its image, she left Christos, her heavenly consort, and descended into this density and darkness after the transcendent light.

During her sojourn, Younger Sophia darted about the darkness, hovering to and fro, trying to impart life to the chaotic inert elements. Helplessly weighed down by matter and darkness, she finally became unable to extricate herself. Nevertheless, just by sheer contact with matter, she produced a being—a serpentine, lion-faced entity, she named “Yaldabaoth” (Greek: *Yalda*, child; *Baoth*, chaos), the entity that would mature into the Demiurge, the workman and half-maker of the cosmos. Upon observing the imperfection she had produced, Younger Sophia realized this entity had come about as a result of ignorance.<sup>444</sup> In such a way, the apparent organization and harmony of the Demiurge’s creation only deceptively conceals its chaotic and absurd nature, i.e. its actual *unreality*. Indeed, at this point Younger Sophia realized the supposedly transcendent light she had perceived from the center of the Pleroma was in fact only a “false light,” or reflection in the darkness.

The term “false light” is significant for multiple reasons. Commonly used by early Gnostics, modern Theosophists observed that “false light” referred to the so-called earthly wisdom (i.e. wisdom acquired through human experience) of the physical world.<sup>445</sup> In addition to complicating modernist interpretations of ancient Gnostic texts

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<sup>443</sup> The term “emanated” is essential here, since no entity has yet elected to *create* anything.

<sup>444</sup> Swiney 27-28.

<sup>445</sup> Swiney explains that “the light, by which the lion-faced power of lust beguiled Pistis Sophia was the false astral light of sensual love, emanating from the lower grades of materialized desires. It absorbs all spiritual light, the divine

on the Demiurge and Lucifer, this term was appropriated by Rosicrucianism and Anthroposophy as an evocation of the Luciferian enlightenment of the ancient occult past as well as the neophyte's experience of initiatory wisdom. Heindel, for example, explained the "false light" of Lucifer stood in direct contrast to the "true light," viz. the light of the Aeon Christ:

Thus, on account of listening to Lucifer, *the false light giver*, man has become subject to sorrow, pain and death. He has been robbed of his innocence and peace. The Christ came into the world to save humanity from sin, sorrow and death. Therefore He called Himself the *true light*, and the others, who had come before, He characterized as thieves and robbers, for they had robbed man of the spiritual sight though they had enlightened him in the physical sense.<sup>446</sup>

While in contrast Steiner exhibited a more humanitarian outlook on the nature of Lucifer, he nonetheless agreed that true enlightenment came from the love of Christ, whose potency could not be duplicated or plagiarized.<sup>447</sup>

According to Sethian, Orphian, and Valentinian sects of Gnosticism, the Demiurge

love of the soul, and depriving it of all power, renders it a prey of every evil influence of lust and passion and illusion. This is the 'First Great Lapse' of the Soul from the upward way." Swiney 19, see ibid. 15-18 for context.

<sup>446</sup> The term "false light" was commonly used in Gnosticism to describe the so-called earthly wisdom (i.e. wisdom acquired through human experience) of the Demiurgical realm. This same term was appropriated by Rosicrucianism, Theosophy, and Anthroposophy in order to liken initial human insight to Luciferian enlightenment of the ancient occult past. Heindel, for example, explained the "false light" of Lucifer stood in direct contrast to the "true light," viz. the light of Christ. "We read in the Bible of two great cities, strangely similar yet directly opposite. One is the city of Babylon, the birthplace of confusion, where men cease to be brothers and separated from one another. It lies upon seven hills by a river and is ruled over by a king, Lucifer—the 'day star'—the light giver. His fall from heaven is lamented exceedingly in the fourteenth chapter of Isaiah, and later on we hear of the fall of that great city, which has become an abomination, is called a harlot, having caused war, trouble and desolation among all the people of the earth. /Then, in supreme antithesis, we are told of another city called the New Jerusalem, which occupies the honored position as bride. In that city there is *not a flowing river but a sea of glass*. It also lies upon seven hills, is ruled over by another light giver who is called 'the light of the world,' and it is a city of peace where the gates are never closed although the precious Tree of Life is within. This city is not a city of this world, but a city which has come down from heaven./ [...] Thus, on account of listening to Lucifer, *the false light giver*, man has become subject to sorrow, pain and death. He has been robbed of his innocence and peace. The Christ came into the world to save humanity from sin, sorrow and death. Therefore He called Himself the *true light*, and the others, who had come before, He characterized as thieves and robbers, for they had robbed man of the spiritual sight though they had enlightened him in the physical sense." Heindel, *Questions and Answers* 208-209.

<sup>446</sup> Swiney explains that "the light, by which the lion-faced power of lust beguiled Pistis Sophia was the false astral light of sensual love, emanating from the lower grades of materialized desires. It absorbs all spiritual light, the divine love of the soul, and depriving it of all power, renders it a prey of every evil influence of lust and passion and illusion. This is the 'First Great Lapse' of the Soul from the upward way." Swiney 19, see also 15-19 for context.

<sup>447</sup> See esp. Steiner, "Lucifer the Light Bearer of Light, Christ the Bringer of Love: March 30, 1906, Düsseldorf," *The Christian Mystery* 105-111.

came into existence as ignorant as his mother had become during her misadventure into the Pleroma. Declaring the limits beyond the Pleroma his own realm, Yaldabaoth produced seven sons, the Archons, and proceeded to attempt *creating* life in his image. But upon recognizing his creation was lifeless form, the emaciated deity called upon his mother to animate his handiwork. Selflessly, Younger Sophia sent forth an impulse of her own divine light, the very light that her son used to animate the entire cosmos, most especially the human species, which he made in his image.<sup>448</sup> In this manner, Yaldabaoth prostituted his mother with the Archons to corrupt her body and, subsequently, mankind. In her misery Sophia awakened from ignorance of her home in the Pleroma, eventually cleansed herself by practicing sexual abstinence, and pleaded for forgiveness from the Pleroma in multiple songs.<sup>449</sup> She also became an opponent of her son, the Demiurge, who continued to lord over the physical world, whose manifold forms, though imbued with the inexhaustible life force of Sophia, he blindly proclaimed as his own.

When Younger Sophia's lamentations resonated to the Pleromic center, Elder Sophia took pity upon her daughter and commanded her son to descend into the depths to save his sister. But when the higher emanations of the Demiurge saw the coming of the Christos, the true light, they became enraged and obstructed his path with lesser, more diabolical Archons. Meanwhile, as Younger Sophia cried out once more to the Christos in recognition of his approach, the Archons muffled her songs and constrained her sorely.

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<sup>448</sup> Even the ancient Gnostics only occasionally, if at all, depicted the Demiurge as a celestial tyrant mandating the absolute conformity of the human species. Invariably, however, the aim behind his intimidation and deception tends to preserve the greatest ignorance of mankind itself: that the Creator did not create the psyche; he only formed the body in which the psyche has become encased. This is because the spirit that Jehovah *breathed* into the clay he formed into the body of Adam was, while of his own essence, still only a portion of the life force already within himself, and therefore preexisting the confines of his constructed reality. See Mead *Fragments* 351-352. Recall also Joh Fredersen's words about valuing Hel's life more than his own breath, and that he would take her from God if he had the chance. Such an attitude resonates perfectly with the Gnostic portrayal of Yaldabaoth's betrayal of his mother Sophia.

<sup>449</sup> Swiney 25-26, 33.

As the Christos continued searching for Younger Sophia, her cries attracted the Aeons, who pulled her from the muck of the denser worlds and presented her to the Christos, who, exhausted from his search, suddenly found renewed strength in his companion and destroyed Yaldabaoth's creation with the combined light of himself and his companion. Afterward, the syzygies united and ascended victorious far beyond what was Yaldabaoth's realm of delusion.<sup>450</sup>

This mythos received heavy analysis at the hands of *fin-de-siècle* mystics. Some like Madame Blavatsky and Frances Swiney equated the feminine principle in the universe with the inner nature of the male, contrasting it with the female whom they regarded as the repository of all creative forces. But while such mystics eagerly ascribed the so-called "Divine Feminine" an unquestionable superiority to the materially-fixated male,<sup>451</sup> most leaders of esoteric schools were less rigid. While not reducing the Sophia narrative to sheer corporeality, G.R.S. Mead, Heindel, Steiner, Reuss, and van der Meulen contended that the feminine principle *did* exhibit the highest evolved characteristics of the human race which sought to free humanity from the bonds of differentiated sexuality, since the male principle—in whom the living spirit had become quenched in the allegory of Sophia and Yaldabaoth—degraded the feminine principle to the basest abuse.<sup>452</sup> But this symbolism, they charged, was not to be understood in terms of sex and sexuality, the

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<sup>450</sup> Steiner, „Die Gnostischen Grundlagen.“ *Drei Perspektiven* 120-121. Swiney 30.

<sup>451</sup> See e.g. Swiney 21-22: "The spiritual feminization of the [human] race proceeds as woman, more and more, frees herself from the gross bonds of differentiated sexuality. This supreme truth is duly emphasized in this allegory. It is remarkable to note through history how at certain epochs, when the civilizations painfully built upon by men touched their zenith, their rapid decline followed through the degradation and sex-subjection of women by law, custom, prejudice, and religion. Woman, the higher self, was both feared and distrusted by the lower self, man, who, through his increasing materialism, became physically the stronger, and thus subjected the more spiritual factor to his rule and abuse."

<sup>452</sup> Similar to Steiner and others' lectures, Heindel wrote that "we must remember that the spirit is neither male nor female, but manifests in that way alternately, as a rule. We have all been men and we have all been women. Therefore there can be no question of inequality if we look at life from the larger point of view. Certain lessons must be learned by the spirit in each age which can only be learned from the standpoint of a woman, and there are other lessons only to be learned by incarnation in a male body" (*Questions and Answers* 41-42). See also his assertion that women possess "masculine souls" and men "feminine souls" in terms of psychical susceptibility in *ibid.* 22-23, 40-41.

mere animal nature of mankind. While women indeed had greater propensity to spirituality than their more practical counterparts, they claimed, this general rule applied no less to particular cases than their shared idea that, simply because Europeans were more highly evolved than Eastern races, that Westerners were more inclined to mysticism or transcendent experiences.<sup>453</sup> Thus, their interpretation of these ancient myths was as much influenced by the nineteenth-century values of gendered complementarianism as it was contemporary racial conceptions.

Appealing again to the syncretic motifs behind the Gnostic myths, the leaders of German-speaking Europe's esoteric schools recognized that the feminine principle in mankind signified imagination, i.e. the intuited, inspirational dynamism behind all practical, three-dimensional thought process and production of the mind.<sup>454</sup> While indeed transcendent of earthly human experience, Heindel and Steiner maintained that mankind's relationship to Younger Sophia could be ascertained, should be ascertained, with regard to knowledge and imagination. Not unlike the Theosophical Society's teaching of the "unveiling of Isis," first propounded by Blavatsky in 1877,<sup>455</sup> many esoteric schools including Anthroposophy and Rosicrucianism taught that modern

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<sup>453</sup> Heindel and Steiner demonstrated that, much like telepaths and clairvoyants (whose recent ancestors, they noted, generally hailed from rural areas), Easterners derived this penchant to spiritual practices and ancient modes of psychical perception not due to their evolutionary deviance from the current Aryan race. Instead, the infrequent manifestation of psychical consciousness occurred in such peoples as a sign of their spiritual underdevelopment, a rapidly disappearing trace of Atlantean faculties that lacked development in the mastery of *individuated* psychical faculties. See esp. Heindel 265-267, 280-281, 290-291. *Questions and Answers* 49-50; *Cosmo-Conception* 437-441. Steiner, "The Three Paths of Initiation: September 19, 1906, Basel," *The Christian Mystery* 125; "The Yoga Path, Christian Gnostic Initiation, and the Esotericism of the Rosicrucians," *ibid.* 133-135.

<sup>454</sup> The centrality of feminine "imagination" in Rosicrucianism and Anthroposophy cannot be undermined. As Heindel explains: "The sex of the Ego does not, of course, express itself as [sexless] in the inner worlds. It manifests there as two distinct qualities—Will and Imagination. The Will is the male power and is allied to the Sun forces; Imagination is the female power and is always linked to the Moon forces. This accounts for the imaginative trend of woman and for the special power which the Moon exercises over the female organism." Heindel, *Cosmo-Conception* 267, see also the discussion of feminine imagination on *ibid.* 284, 360-361. For imagination in future evolution, see *ibid.* 427-428. See also Steiner, "How Does One Gain Higher Knowledge in the Rosicrucian Sense?" *The Christian Mystery* 148-149, in which the mystic explains how "Imagination is the second step on the Rosicrucian path." The acquisition of true imagination will be discussed in the next chapter as regards alchemy.

<sup>455</sup> See Helena P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of the Ancient and Modern Science and Theology* Vol. I & II (New York, NY: J.W. Bouton, 1877).

mankind's present spiritual task was to access the feminine principle of the universe, internally and externally. The occult significance about this "unveiling of Isis" is highly complex, and in order to ascertain its relevance to science and technology requires a brief overview of the ahistorical syncretism linking Egyptian and Christian myth.

Speaking at Dornach in December 1920, Steiner noted that the intensified suppression of the feminine, both human and divine, in modern Western religiosity correlated directly to the materialist prioritization of the concrete and the practical over the abstract and the mystical. Spiritual science, he claimed, would rectify this grotesque bias through the recovery of true knowledge bridging the conceptual gap between the rational (masculine) and the irrational (feminine):

With the knowledge that comes from Initiation Science through Imagination and Inspiration modern man will rise to the spiritual realization to the living Christ. Men must learn to understand how Isis, the living, divine Sophia, had to disappear when the time came for the development which has driven astrology into mathematics, into geometry, into the science of mechanics. But it will also be understood that when living Imagination resurfaces from mathematics, phoronomy and geometry, this means the finding of Isis, of the new Isis, of the divine Sophia whom man must find if the Christ Power that is his since the Mystery of Golgotha is to become alive, completely alive, that is to say, filled with light within him.<sup>456</sup>

Surveying the evolutionary trajectory of human consciousness of the physical realm since its inception by Lucifer at the cusp of the previous Atlantean Epoch and the present Aryan Epoch, Theosophists, Anthroposophists, and Rosicrucians realized that modern mankind would have to plunge deeper into materialist thought before verifying, scientifically as well as spiritually, the life force, the truly vital force of Sophia, stitching together the material realm (symbolized in Egyptian mythology by the body of Osiris, which, cut into twelve parts, Isis originally resurrected) from beyond the grasp of the

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<sup>456</sup> Steiner, "Lecture III: Magi; Dornach, Dec. 25, 1920," *Search for the New Isis* 45-46.

Lucifer-Demiurge, represented in Egyptian mythology by Typhon, who killed Osiris and tried to prevent Isis from resurrecting him.<sup>457</sup>

Almost all occult seekers from the aristocratic Madame Blavatsky to the physician Franz Hartmann posited that the esoteric doctrines concerning the Virgin Mary and Jesus of Christianity indeed echoed the teachings of Isis and Osiris in ancient Egyptian mythology. For various Hermetic and astrological reasons, they taught, the spiritual mission of modern mankind had in some way become reversed of its mission in ancient Egypt, viz. the rediscovery of occult truths latent in all detectable phenomena, the atom, the human body, the universe. Religious practices and rites of Egypt, such as mummification, were literally employed to focus the incarnating psyche on its corporeal identity, the physical forms in the present. Preserved in the prophetic symbolism of the ancient religious parable about Isis (psychic faculties) in her magical resurrection of Osiris (physical faculties), this prolonged naturalization of the self's awareness quelled the remnants of inner-consciousness, the psychic perception of the Atlantean Epoch.<sup>458</sup>

In addition, these esoteric teachers argued that the occult truth of Isis and Osiris was complemented and reversed by the Christian mythos of the Virgin Mary—who bore Jesus, in whom dwelt Christ, the Savior of the World—and Mary Magdalene—Jesus's closest disciple, according to the Gnostic doctrine, unto whom He imparted his holiest knowledge. As indicated by Steiner but also by scholars like Arthur Drews, one must understand a mythological character's name, such as "Mary," in terms of a meditative archetype, and the various characters under such a name as differing manifestations of

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<sup>457</sup> For Steiner's syncretic perspective concerning the Lucifer-Christ-Sophia/Mary mythos and the earlier Typhon-Osiris-Isis mythos, see his "Lecture II: Dornach, Dec. 24 1920," *Search for the New Isis* 18-33.

<sup>458</sup> For ancient Egyptian religious practices and human evolution, see Steiner's "Ancient Wisdom and New Apocalyptic Wisdom," *Universe, Earth, and Man* esp. 30-32, and "Lecture I: Spiritual Connections between the Culture-Streams of Ancient and Modern Times; September 2, 1908," *Egyptian Myths and Mysteries* 7-9.

that archetype. Thus, in this way the Virgin Mary, Jesus's mother, and Mary Magdalene, His companion, can be considered respective representations of Elder and Younger Sophia, the two distinct forms of "wisdom" in the Gnostic mythos.<sup>459</sup>

Such a meditative principle is necessary in understanding Steiner's intellectual methodology stated the following regarding Christianity's inversion of Egyptian mythic motifs:

We must give form to this legend, for it sets forth the truth of our times. We must speak of the dead and lost Isis, the divine Sophia, even as the ancient Egyptians spoke of the dead and lost Osiris. We must set out in search of the dead body of the new Isis, the dead body of the divine Sophia, with a force which, although we cannot yet rightly understand it, is nevertheless in us – with the force of the Christ, with the force of the new Osiris. We must approach luciferic science and seek there the coffin of Isis; in other words we must find in that which natural science gives us something which stimulates us inwardly towards Imagination, Inspiration and Intuition. This brings to us the help of Christ within – Christ, Who remains hidden in darkness if we do not illuminate Him with divine wisdom. Armed with this force of the Christ, with the new Osiris, we must set out in search of Isis, the new Isis. Lucifer does not cut Isis in pieces, as Ahriman-Typhon did with Osiris; on the contrary, Isis is spread out, in her true shape, in the beauty of the whole Universe. Isis shines out of the cosmos in an aura of many shining colors. We must learn to understand Isis when we look out into the Cosmos; we must learn to see this Cosmos in an aura of shining colors. But just as the Ahriman-Typhon cut Osiris into pieces, so Lucifer blurs and washes out the colors in all their clear distinctness, blends and merges into one single whole the parts which are so beautifully distributed over the heavens, the limbs of the new Isis which go to make the great firmament of the heavens.<sup>460</sup>

In order to emphasize the holy wisdom embodied in the mother of Jesus, Steiner went so

<sup>459</sup> See esp. Steiner, "The Mystery of Golgotha: December 2, 1906," *The Christian Mystery* 57-58. Drawing a literal connection, Steiner went so far to assert that, historically speaking, Jesus' mother was called Sophia. He pointed to John's Gospel, which he associated with the Gnostic origins of Christianity, and drew further connections between what he considered the spiritual significance behind the historical reality: "John baptized Jesus in the Jordan. A dove descended from heaven, and in that moment a spiritual fertilization occurred. The mother of Jesus, who is fertilized here—who is she? The Chela, Jesus of Nazareth, takes his I-being away in this moment, and the highly developed Manas is fertilized, and Buddhi enters. The highly developed Manas that receives Buddhi is wisdom—*Sophia*—the mother fertilized by Jesus' Father. The name *Mary*, like *Maya*, indicates in general the name of his mother. We read in the first chapter of Luke's Gospel, 'An angel came to her and spoke, Hail, O favored one.... Behold, you will conceive ...and bear a son... The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most high will overshadow you.' The Holy Spirit is the Father of Jesus; the dove that flies down fructifies Sophia, who is found in Jesus."

<sup>460</sup> Steiner, "Lecture II," *Search for the New Isis* 26-27. Steiner seems to have developed these ideas from a previous discussion, which likewise discusses the parallels concerning Isis-Mary and Osiris-Christ: "Lecture VIII: The Stages of Evolution of the Human Form, The Expulsion of Human Beings, the Four Human Types; September 10, 1908," *Egyptian Myths and Mysteries* 49-55.

far in his lectures and treatises to indicate that she was actually named *Sophia*, and even denied her status as a virginity, claiming that such passages were significant for the initiate to ascertain the occult truths of Christian myth.<sup>461</sup> Other leaders of *fin-de-siècle* esoteric schools shared this outlook, and the above material in Steiner's lecture was certainly not original.<sup>462</sup> Indeed, they foresaw the culmination of the Aryan Epoch presaged in Christian soteriology, when Christ (physical faculties), symbolized by Jesus, would return to earth in order to free his Church (psychical faculties)—better known as the Bride of Christ, symbolized esoterically by Mary—from the spiritual forces of Satan-Lucifer, whose psychical capacity Aryan mankind has overcome through evolution. The enlightenment by Lucifer spirits was a necessary catalyst only for beginning the evolutionary individuation, and aggregate mankind has now outgrown any insight this race of Aeons could offer.<sup>463</sup>

Understood in more concrete terms, the modern occult teachers promulgated a mystical doctrine not merely akin to the teachings of ancient Gnosticism. More specifically, these doctrines posited that the apocalyptic antagonisms of the Gnostic worldview were coming into fuller fruition within modernism itself. They agreed the prophetic core of esoteric Christianity demonstrated that, essentially, mankind will continue to exist in a predicament of radical alienation and separation from authentic reality until the end of the Aryan Epoch. It is mankind's separation from this true

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<sup>461</sup> On the mythic significance of Mary's status as both virgin and mother, see also Mead, *Fragments* 191; and Swiney 29-31.

<sup>462</sup> Heindel shared Steiner's conception as a Rosicrucian, stating that Mary and Joseph were Essenes who underwent ritual copulation to conceive Jesus. Thus: "His mother, the Virgin Mary, was also a type of the highest human purity and because of that was selected to become the mother of Jesus. His father was a high Initiate, virgin, and capable of performing the act of fecundation as a sacrament, without personal desire or passion. /Thus the beautiful, pure and lovely spirit whom we know as Jesus of Nazareth was born into a pure and passionless body" (*Cosmo-Conception* 378).

<sup>463</sup> See e.g. Steiner, "The Intellect as a Gift from Lucifer: Its Future Transformation into a New Clairvoyance; April 29, 1906, Stuttgart," *The Christian Mystery* 119-120, 120-122.

reality—represented by the Supreme Being, Elder Sophia, and the expanse of the Pleroma—which is the fount of every soul, the first necessary step toward absolute spiritual individuation. This battle between light and darkness, spirit and matter, drags on not merely among the unseen forces within the universe, but even within the existential conflict of the individual, especially those persons hurled into the most urbanized, scientific, materialistic environs of Western civilization.<sup>464</sup> Behind all the seeming causes of daily suffering lies the cause that humans are separated from their true source, their true nature. Were humans evil or had they ever been evil to save themselves from this condition, they would have assuredly accomplished this task. After all, suffering is not something in which one voluntarily or happily persists—if anyone knows anything about it or personally knows a better alternative.

In keeping with the Gnostic worldview, the esoteric schools admitted that, whether in the present or the distant past, the reason for mankind never having saved itself is quite simply and obviously that it cannot do so. By whatever means, then, the next stage in human evolution would occur first with the expansion of human consciousness, by the spirit of Christ who bears the wisdom of Isis, and only then through his physical faculties. In essence, this future renewal of mankind's psychical faculties in the physical realm was known as the “the unveiling of Isis,” brought about, in Christological terms, only by a return of Christ consciousness in mankind.

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<sup>464</sup> As Steiner explained: “The Christmas Mystery must be grasped anew by modern man. Let him realize that first of all he must seek Isis, in order that Christ may appear to him. The cause of the misfortunes and troubles in modern civilization is not that we have lost the Christ Who stands before us in a far greater glory than Osiris did in the eyes of the Egyptians. We have not lost Him and need not to set out in search of Him, armed with the force of Isis – what we have lost is the *wisdom and knowledge* of Christ Jesus. This is what we must find again, with the help of the force of Christ which is in us. /This is how we must look upon the content of the Christmas festival. For many modern people Christmas is nothing but an occasion for giving and receiving presents, something which they celebrate every year through habit. The Christmas festival has become an empty phrase like so many other things in modern life. And it is just because so many things have become a phrase, that modern life is so full of calamities and chaos. This is in truth the deeper cause for the chaos in our modern life.”

In the teachings of Gnosticism and the *fin-de-siècle* esoteric schools, Aeons such as Sophia and the Christos have made, and continually make, redemptive efforts for the sake of mankind, and yet only few among these mortals are attuned, or present, for the initiatory expansion of inner consciousness. As significantly outlined in the above narrative of the *Pistis Sophia*, it is the series of obstacles between these successive messengers and redeemers of light and mankind that impede, distort, and pervert their redemptive knowledge.<sup>465</sup> A severe and terrifying nature underlies these obstacles, which invariably wound or maim these Aeons, each threatening to extinguish their divine messages. Likewise, analogous to this celestial conflict is the inner struggle of the mortal human undergoing the spiritual transformation in groping for higher realms of existence. Elucidating this transformative process in the initiation rites of Greco-Roman mystery schools, Steiner explained the neophyte's cataclysmic reception of transcendent knowledge thus:

During its revelation the soul enters into a state of spiritual ecstasy and illumination in which it ceases to know, to think, and to recognize in the ordinary sense of the words, for at this point it merges and has identified itself with the divine. The material and the spiritual have become one. The wisdom realized here cannot be imparted in thought-concepts or abstracted ideas, but instead: “It is experienced, and one who goes through this experience knows that no one can impart it, for the only way of reaching it is to live it.”<sup>466</sup>

Through the disciplinary process the initiate thus attunes himself to *know* the nature of the cosmos and himself and, through the application of that spiritual knowledge, to channel Sophia's wisdom from beyond the Pleroma. After all, “wisdom” (Greek: *Sophia*) only comes about through the application of redemptive “knowledge” (Greek:

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<sup>465</sup> Heindel's *The Message of the Stars* outlines in detail the tasks of various angels associated with particular planets; see e.g. “Chapter XV: Planetary Octaves,” 341-346. Steiner, “The Christian Mystery; February 9, 1906, Düsseldorf,” *The Christian Mystery* 40. See also Steiner's comments on the “seven angels” and the “seven planets” in “The Apocalypse of St. John,” in *Christianity as Mystical Fact: And the Mysteries of Antiquity*. Third Edition (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1914): 177-197, esp. 181-183, 189.

<sup>466</sup> Steiner, “Lecture XII: Christianity and Heathen Wisdom,” *Christianity as Mystical Fact* 216-217.

*gnosis*), and only then is the Logos, the Word of God, manifest. In this manner, the individual's reception of gnosis is truly a cosmic event, even if undetectable by humanity's current norms of sense perception.

According to the *fin-de-siècle* mystics, this hermeneutical manifestation occurs likewise among the entire human race through evolutionary forces. Emphasizing the practical cognitive processes used in his work as an engineer, Heindel repeatedly emphasized that the mythic archetype Christ, the Word of God, had inadvertently induced into the Western consciousness "the superfluity of God" by infiltrating the evolved unconscious creative principle to strive toward godhood. In accord with Steiner's teachings and the clairvoyant visions of other contemporary mystics, the Rosicrucian anticipated how Judeo-Christian scripture presaged in its narrative of "the Word made Flesh" the next step in human evolution at the end of the present Aryan Epoch, during the so-called Jupiter Period. Such corporeal transformation could not occur unless an inner, psychic step in evolution, a rediscovery of Sophian wisdom and feminine imagination first transpired now in the Earth Period of the Aryan Epoch. Indicating that the mind is the one human faculty possessed by the spirit in the process of creation, Heindel wrote that in the Jupiter Period—

The spiritualized and perfected larynx will speak the creative Word, but the perfect mind will decide as to the particular form and the volume of vibration, and will thus be the determining factor. Imagination will be the spiritualized faculty directing the work of creation. There is a strong tendency at the present time to regard the faculty of imagination slightly, yet it is one of the most important factors in our civilization. If it were not for the imagination, we would still be naked savages. Imagination planned our houses, our clothes and our transportation and transmission facilities. Had not the inventors of these improvements possessed the mind and imagination to form mental images, the

improvements could never have become concrete realities.<sup>467</sup>

[As a result] we shall guide the evolution of the plant kingdom, for that which is at present mineral will then have a plant-like existence and we must work with it there as the Angels are now doing with our plant kingdom. Our faculty of imagination will be so developed that we shall have the ability not only to create forms by means of it, but to endow those forms with vitality.<sup>468</sup>

Heindel thus reminded his readers that while the prophesied marriage of Christ and His Bride, the Church (i.e., humanity, not the religious body exclusively), envisioning the soteriological reconciliation of the psychical in mankind and the psychical beyond the physical plane.<sup>469</sup>

In other words, the Anthroposophical and Rosicrucian philosophies emphasized the Sophia myth and its allegorical variants as both an individual transformation and a foreshadowing in the evolutionary progress of human civilization, to a time when gender and sex would be transcended.<sup>470</sup> Since, they noted, the fabric of the natural and psychological worlds are permeated by masculine and feminine polarities, the

<sup>467</sup> Drawing a direct link between spiritual and the inventive initiative of Western science and technology, Heindel continued: "Any improvement in spiritual or physical conditions must first be imagined as a possibility before it can become an actuality." Heindel, *Cosmo-Conception* 425-426.

<sup>468</sup> Heindel, *Cosmo-Conception* 428. The context of this passage offers further clarification on the significance of evolutionary forces on the mind: "At the present time, however, the mind is not focused in a way that enables it to give a clear and true picture of what the spirit imagines. It is not one-pointed. It gives misty and clouded pictures. Hence the necessity of experiment to show the inadequacies of the first conception, and bring about new imaginings and ideas until the image produced by the spirit in mental substance has been reproduced in physical substance. /At best, we are able to shape through the mind only such images as have to do with Form, because the human mind was not started until the Earth Period, and therefore is now in its form, or 'mineral' stage, hence in our operations we are confined to forms, to minerals. We can imagine ways and means of working with the mineral forms of the three lower kingdoms, but can do little or nothing with living bodies. We may indeed graft living branch to living tree, or living part of animal or man to other living part, but it is not *life* with which we are working; it is form only. We are making different conditions, but the life which already inhabited the form continues to do so still. To create life is beyond man's power until his mind has become alive. [...] /Our present humanity will have to work with the new life wave, which entered evolution in the Earth Period and *now ensouls the minerals*. We are now working with it by means of the faculty of imagination, giving it form—building it into ships, bridges, railways, houses, etc." Heindel, *Cosmo-Conception* 427.

<sup>469</sup> Thus mankind's acknowledgement of the psychical realms was necessary in order to realize experientially, then empirically, the superiority of the irrational over the rational and, implicitly, the virtuous feminine over the baser masculine whose "might-makes-right" dictum held sway not only over mankind's limited sense perception, but also its science and technology, its social order, and—despite the moral principles of religion—its daily lifestyle.

<sup>470</sup> The phyletic falling into and falling away from sexuality was taught to extract the individual from base egotism. See e.g. Steiner, "The Purification of the Blood from the Passion of Selfhood through the Mystery of Golgotha: April 1, 1907, Berlin," *The Christian Mystery* 100. See also Heindel's discussion on the "separation of the sexes" in *Cosmo-Conception* 267-268.

pervasiveness of genders required elucidation in terms of Sophia and the Christos. Surely what distinguishes the spiritual faculties of man from that of other animals is his penchant to systematize, explore, classify, expand, and organize the universe simply for the sake of knowledge. This insatiable curiosity poses a perennial threat to the autocracy of the Demiurge, who must deter each human being from exercising his psychical strengths and discovering his own hidden godhood.

By making this concerted effort to manifest the spiritual in the physical, these and other esoteric schools during the early twentieth century only emulated ancient sects of Gnosticism. In contrast to mystical orders pandering a strictly orientalist philosophy, Anthroposophy, Rosicrucianism, the O.T.O., and later circles like the Fraternitas Saturni taught that during enlightenment the soul does not merely return to the mystic flame whence it originally sprung. Rather, by realigning itself with the transcendental wisdom from the Pleroma the soul recalls its mission for higher individuation and hence confers through its present incarnation a certain amount of psychical force into the physical realm.

For the current study, the Lucifer-Christ-Sophia dynamic propounded in these esoteric schools and Hellenistic Gnosticism raises difficulties for two main reasons. First, even in light of the few remaining Gnostic texts at the disposal of early twentieth-century Europeans, the characterological relationships between Lucifer, Christ, and Sophia are exceedingly convoluted and fluid. Second, the esoteric schools' teachings on Sophia—whatever official designation they gave her according to their lexicon—are obscured by vague textual references often requiring the elucidation of a spiritual teacher in the school. For example, Steiner had originally intended his lecture series *The Search for the*

*New Isis: Divine Sophia* to remain available only to initiated Anthroposophists.<sup>471</sup> In fact, it is noteworthy that Steiner's leaked mysteries, delivered at Dornach in December 1920, bear an uncanny similarity to the later publications by other high-grade Anthroposophical initiates such as Johanna van der Meulen's arcane treatises on the Holy Grail, whose mysteries Steiner had repeatedly referred to in public lectures and articles as the vessel containing the psychic mysteries to mankind in its present evolutionary state.<sup>472</sup> For these reasons, further research must be conducted to elucidate how *Algol* and *Metropolis* reflect perfectly the revival of Gnosticism's teachings regarding especially Christ and the tripartite Sophia.

### *Fantasies of Redemption*

Just as the esoteric schools during the early twentieth century charged their initiates to transform industrial modernism from the inside out, the plots of *Algol* and *Metropolis* demonstrate on a narrative level characters who, reforming their technocratic societies, symbolize the Gnostic sparks of spiritual light that have descended into and seek to redeem the darkness. But the heroes and heroines in these films symbolize more than people or spiritual realities. Indeed, they represent transcendental archetypes within the human experience that, when fully ascertained, connect their associations with one another to a monistic expression of the cosmos itself and its eternal cycle of light and darkness. Only a more thorough study can illuminate the intricately faithful references in

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<sup>471</sup> Steiner, Anonymous, trans. *The Search for the New Isis: Divine Sophia; Dornach, Dec. 23-26, 1920*. Third Edition (Spring Valley, NY: Mercury Press, 1983/1994). This text is, of course, not Steiner's only publication in which he discusses Gnosticism, Gnostic beliefs, and Gnostic practices in his lectures and articles. By definition, his spiritual science relies on a detailed discussion of transcendental practices pervading the past human experience, for syncretistic as well as practical purposes. This particular text varies from others by Steiner in its direct correlations between the doctrines of Anthroposophy and those of the ancient Gnostic Christians and contemporary mystery schools.

<sup>472</sup> Steiner, "How does One Gain Higher Knowledge in the Rosicrucian State? December 11, 1906, Munich," *The Christian Mystery* 144-160.

*Algol* and *Metropolis* to the Lucifer-Christos-Sophia myths of Gnosticism, and anyone familiar with their plots will notice multiple parallels between the filmic narratives and the Christos-Sophian myth. This section will demonstrate how a particular version of this narrative, the Primal Man, must have inspired the filmmakers behind these science-fiction dramas, finding its impetus in the teachings of *fin-de-siècle* esoteric schools and scholarly research in German-speaking Europe.

Known in the original Greek as *Anthropos*, the Primal Man was a heroic figure popularized by many twentieth-century writers after the recovery of the Turfan texts in 1902.<sup>473</sup> Already known through Gnostic texts like the *Pistis Sophia*, the Primal Man is depicted as the luminous child of God's light and love who descends into the cosmic realm. There he becomes enslaved by his love of lower nature, resulting in the creation of planetary human souls and the cycle of desire, birth, and death. Deliverance follows when the human souls, awakened by revelation through the divine messenger Poimandres, lay aside the garment of the body and return to the light realm of God by recognizing their divine origin and destiny.<sup>474</sup> In this way, their reunification represents the resurrection of the Primal Man and the total obtainment of cosmic self-consciousness through means of psychical individuation.

The Primal Man was widely influential motif in early twentieth-century perspectives on Gnosticism. In the immediate years following the Turfan discovery, newly publicized works on early Christian texts such as the “Hymn of the Pearl” in the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas* exhibited this same themes of the Primal Man, revealing yet again another

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<sup>473</sup> In the *Pistis Sophia*, the Christos is personified by the Aeon “Jeu,” the overseer of the Light, messenger of the First Precept, and constitutes the forces of the Heimarmene. Grimstad 15; 127.

<sup>474</sup> Grimstad 14-17.

connection between Jesus's authentic teachings and their similarity to those of contemporary mystery schools of Hellenistic Rome, Persia, and Babylon. Even van der Meulen's first book, published in 1914, treated a Christological variant of this myth.<sup>475</sup> Such apocryphal texts reaffirmed how every initiate and follower of Christ must descend into his inner depths, recall his true identity, and redeem his darkness in order to prepare the feminine soul (Younger Sophia) for the return of the masculine spirit (Christos).<sup>476</sup> By the Weimar era, this double-sexed nature of the Primal Man was already widely discussed among scholars and mystics. In *The Decline of the West* (1918-1922), Oswald Spengler maintained that the "savior in need of salvation" constitutes the core of what he called "the Jesus cult." This cult appeared in Jewish, Iranian, and Islamic variants as a new and vigorous religiosity in the evolution of Western culture; moreover, according to Spengler, the recovery of the Turfan texts issued humanity's latest epoch and indicated the march of spiritual progress.<sup>477</sup>

During the Weimar era, treatises like Richard Reitzenstein's *Das iranische Erlösungsmysterium* (The Iranian Redemption Mystery, 1921), Rudolf Bultmann's *Das Urchristentum* (Primitive Christianity, 1925), and Alfred Jeremias' *Die außerbiblische Erlösererwartung* (The Non-Canonical Expectation of a Redeemer, 1927) led the discourse that the Primal Man was the prototype for the early Babylonian, Egyptian,

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<sup>475</sup> See esp. van der Meulen, „Kapital III: Das Hinabsteigen Christi durch die Reihen der Hierarchien bis auf die Erde,“ *Buch I* 119-122; and „Kapital IV: „Der Gott-Mensch Christus, auf Erden lebend,“ *ibid.* 123-127.

<sup>476</sup> See e.g. the pamphlet Erwin Preuschen, *Zwei gnostische Hymnen* (Giessen: J. Ricker, 1904), which contains the "Das Brautlied der Sophia" and "Lied des apostels Judas Thomas im Lande der Inder" (a.k.a. "Das Lied von der Erlösung") with Greek and Syriac originals included. G.R.S. Mead praised Preuschen's translations in his *Echoes from the Gnosis, Vol. X: The Gnosis of the Mind* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Co., 1906): esp. 8-13.

<sup>477</sup> Spengler credited Reitzenstein's *Das iranische Erlösungsmysterium* and the Turfan discoveries with shifting the focus definitively to the East—in his view the spiritual wellspring of primitive Christianity—rather than the dried up Hellenistic rationalism of the West. Similarly, *Metropolis* implicitly credits Eastern mysticism *vis-à-vis* Rotwang for the occult influences that rock the city. Cf. Grimstad 16-17.

Persian, and especially Kabbalistic-Semitic and Gnostic-Christian salvific traditions.<sup>478</sup>

Through these and other texts, this Pan-Babylonian discourse had disseminated into German popular culture to such an extent that the Primal Man had become seen a prototype for mystical literary heroes. Beginning in 1924, for example, Thomas Mann based his four-part novel *Joseph* on this legend. Drawing his knowledge from sources by Edgar Dacqué (1924), Dimitri Mereschkowski (1924), and Alfred Jeremias (1916), Mann incorporated the biblical story of Joseph into a narrative based on Gnostic speculation. For months Mann poured himself tirelessly over contemporary research on Gnostic mythology before producing his fantastic tale of the biblical patriarch and his redemption of Egypt.<sup>479</sup>

In this same vein, von Harbou adapted the Primal Man for *Metropolis*. She created the awakened hero Freder, engineer from the ruling class, becomes compelled to save his enslaved syzygy Maria, leader of the city workers, as both struggle to reunite themselves as well as the factions they represent in order to restore peace and unity to their city. Steeped in melodramatic dualism, von Harbou's love story is no different than Jeremias and Reitzenstein's shared observation that the Primal Man plays both the savior and the saved, the redeemer and the redeemed, since the primordial being who falls into material bondage and the heavenly twin—who awakens him through gnosis and brings him home—are one and the same.<sup>480</sup> Freder represents simultaneously the syzygy living ignorant in the clamp of the Demiurge-Lucifer, esp. Joh Fredersen, and awakened by Maria, his female counterpart, as well as the syzygy who, discovering the torment of the

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<sup>478</sup> There were also many pre-Weimar texts published on this subject, most notably Wilhelm Bousset's *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis (The Main Problems of Gnosticism)*, 1907). Grimstad 14-17.

<sup>479</sup> A detailed discussion of Mann's background work on the tetralogy is given in Grimstad 24-25.

<sup>480</sup> In their studies, Jeremias researched Babylonian cults surrounding Tammuz and Reitzenstein Mandean and Manichaean traditions. Grimstad 15-16, 7.

fallen Maria descends repeatedly to redeem the dark materiality created by his father. Likewise, Maria represents the Higher Sophia who enlightens the ignorant soul, Freder, as well as Younger Sophia whom the Demiurge-Lucifer, esp. Rotwang, lures and symbolically rapes in order to transfer her life onto his new creation, represented by the Machine Man. Even Freder has a double, Georgi, who falls victim to the Machine Man's seductions. Indeed, the true Maria is no less a redeemer than the true Freder, who together constitute the proverbial Heart that unites the Head and the Hands of the city.

To underscore her epigram's call for a true mediator, von Harbou employed into her script the complex mirroring, mistaking, and doubling of such characters mentioned in the diagram above. For example, it is no coincidence that Fredersen, Rotwang, and Freder exhibit (or appear to exhibit) sexual attraction for the Machine Man, which also reminds them of Hel, i.e. Elder Sophia. Hence, Rotwang's obsession to reclaim Hel from Fredersen for himself (and, implicitly, to destroy Joh's son): the malicious Lucifer, having straggled in the course of evolution, must attach himself to the corporeal human in order to progress further up the phyletic chain. And yet—ironically, complementary to all Faustian associations with Rotwang himself—the Lucifer's parasitical interception is necessary for humanity to progress beyond the clutches of the Demiurge: "Now, Joh Fredersen?! Is it not worth the cost of a hand to have created the man of the future – the *Machine Man*?"<sup>481</sup> (Again, this drama utilizes occult and Gnostic symbology to gaze mutually into the past as well as the future.) Appropriately, and much to Rotwang's chagrin, Freder proves to be the true man of the future, as well as the apocalyptic fulfillment of the Primal Man, who not only possesses engineering knowledge but also

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<sup>481</sup> Original: „Nun, Joh Fredersen – ?! Lohnt es sich nicht, eine Hand zu verlieren, um den Menschen der Zukunft – den Maschinen-Menschen geschafften zu haben – ?!“

descends into the Machine Halls in pursuit of Maria and withstands torture at demonic technologies.

Because of the perpetual impetus and psychical insight she gives to the young engineer, Maria cannot be undermined in her equally central role as mediator, the feminine half of the androgynous Heart. Indeed, she serves not only as the inspiration for Freder—prompting him from beginning to end, both directly and indirectly, to take action in unifying the great city—but her virginal-motherly love also invites the predator Rotwang as well, who, in Demiurgical and Luciferian fashion, respectively, attempts on the one hand to block Freder her salvific love (due to his bitterness over the lost Hel, his companion-cum-mother, i.e. Younger Sophia) and his desire to obtain Maria for himself (as the subject of his experiment to return to his past romance, i.e. Elder Sophia) on the other. It is obvious that von Harbou intended Maria and Hel to serve—like the three Marys of esoteric Christianity—practically interchangeable as mother, sister, and companion.<sup>482</sup> Ultimately, though, Maria is Younger Sophia who calls out to the Christos to save her from her plight. By emphasizing the indirect conflicts among characters, von Harbou made the confrontations between Maria and the Machine Man, Freder and Rotwang, Fredersen and Freder, and finally Freder and Rotwang, all the more startling in

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<sup>482</sup> The interchangeable roles of Maria, Hel, and Fredersen's mother are undeniable. At times, the male characters of von Harbou's novel (like in her screenplay) seem unable to distinguish between these women. After having first met Maria in the Eternal Gardens at the beginning of the story, for instance, Freder falls into deep aporia, i.e. doubt of everything he has hitherto known in Metropolis. Instead of immediately pursuing the virginal-motherly apparition, as he does in the film, the young man allows his servants to escort him to his father's mansion. But Freder's existential agony persists. Repeating to himself the sole sentence he has heard from Maria's lips—„Seht, das sind Eure Brüder!“—Freder finds himself wandering the city avenues in front of the old cathedral dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Freder stops and gazes on the silver saint shimmering atop the cathedral, and wonders how long his father will tolerate her standing there. Suddenly, the Virgin Mary atop the cathedral becomes indiscernibly associated with Maria on the one hand, and Hel, who in Freder's infancy had regularly taken the boy to the cathedral, on the other. Von Harbou continues: „Aber die Jungfrau auf der Spitze des Turmes schien ihr eigenes sanftes Sternlicht zu haben und schwebte, losgelöst von der Schwärze des Steines, auf der Sichel des silbernen Mondes über dem Dome. /Nie hatte Freder das Antlitz der Jungfrau gesehen, und doch kannte er es so gut, daß er es hätte zeichnen können: das herbe Antlitz der Jungfrau, das süße Antlitz der Mutter... /Er beugte sich, die Handflächen um das Eisengeländer klammernd. /Sieh mich an, Jungfrau!“ bat er. „Mutter, sieh mich an!““ (Von Harbou, *Metropolis* 24). Thus, von Harbou overlapped and merged the concepts of sibling, mother, and companion in devising Freder's most intimate female relations.

their atavism, as they eventually face one another without “mediation.” As the drama climaxes, each of these three characters is compelled by a unique devotion to the eternally youthful Hel, whose own vitality is realized and doubled in the prophetess Maria.<sup>483</sup>

Brennert and Köhne likewise employed this dramatic scheme in their screenplay for *Algol*, albeit in a far subtler manner. Their intricate network of paired characters underscore not only the dualistic antagonisms of the plotlines but also the complex nature of Gnostic mythological archetypes. Each set of opposed characters can be analyzed in such a way that these dualisms lead the entire narrative to portend two Gnostic subtexts: on the one hand, the creation and destruction of the physical world; on the other hand, the enlightenment and ascent of the soul toward spiritual individuation. In both cases, these subtexts—which *themselves* are diametrically opposed—might be read through the perspective of the lead character, Robert Herne. An entire chapter could not exhaust the possible dualistic readings of a Gnostic subtext in this film. For this reason, this study contains only one reading of the opening scene. In the opening scene, the newly appointed Empress Leonore Nissen visits the workers in the coalmines. Among them, the foreman Robert Herne takes solace as Maria Obal gives him a drink of water as Maria Obal. Upon the sight of the empress among them in the coalmines, Robert and Maria exhibit repulsion and humility, respectively.

On the one hand, this scene and its context represent Younger Sophia’s descent from the wholesness of the Pleroma and subsequently her accidental creation of the Demiurge. Before this scene, the narrator has discussed the planet Algol in the farthest reaches of

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<sup>483</sup> Cf. Elsaesser, *Metropolis* 11-12.

outer space. Like Younger Sophia attracted to the “false light” at the farthest corners of the Pleroma, so the audience feels itself seduced by the mystical light of Algol. In the next scene, the story takes an abrupt turn to the center of the planet earth as an intertitle reads: “In a hot haze far underground, the children of the depths mine coal.”<sup>484</sup> Here the foreman Robert works with his subordinates who drill into the ashen walls of their suffocating atmosphere, representative of the drudgery, pain, and spiritual darkness of the burgeoning physical world. A shaft of light beams down on the foreman who, shirtless, seems to exude a light of his own. The elegant Empress Nissen approaching to speak with him signifies the naïve Younger Sophia who attempts to unite with the “false light” that has drawn her into the Pleroma. Indeed, the humanitarian empress is the Sophia who gives life and livelihood to all throughout Werckmeister’s film by hosting great garden parties for all social classes, inviting her workers “to come with me to celebrate a delightful day—in light and sun.”<sup>485</sup>

Thus the empress is exactly as Gnostic texts depict Younger Sophia. Having inherited her parent’s kingdom because she is “of age” (*mündig*), the powerful and fair-headed Empress Leonore Nissen descends into the darkness of the mines in pursuit of unity and truth. Her persistent attempts to unify herself with Robert reiterate Sophia’s longing to emanate into existence a realm similar to those from which she came. Undeterred by Robert’s rebuff, the following day Leonore invites the workers to her palace for a massive garden party, where she and Robert walk arm in arm together amongst the

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<sup>484</sup> Original: „Tief unter Tag brechen die Kinder der Tiefe in heißem Dunst die Kohle.“

<sup>485</sup> This quote comes from a letter Leonore sends to all the coalminers in her attempt to convince Robert to ally with her in creating a more harmonious kingdom. The Gnostic symbolism about Younger Sophia’s desire to unite with the material realm in order to emanate from herself a beautiful world is obvious in the original German of Leonore’s letter, which reads: „Aus dem Berge heimkommend, bin ich tief bewegt, von dem, was ich sah und in der Tiefe erlebte./ Alle, die für mich arbeiten, sollen morgen mein Gäste sein. Jeder komme mit Frau und Kind, mit mir einen Tag der Freude zu feiern—in Licht und Sonne./ Leonore Nissen.“

playful crowds in “sun and light.” Finally the goodhearted empress says: “Tell me everything you know about your people. Of their plight, their desires, and who they are.”<sup>486</sup> But Robert, casting her hand aside, replies: “You can’t play with me as to their whims! [...] If there is a way in their world, then I will not go it in your hand!”<sup>487</sup>

Thus in later scenes Robert resolves to subvert Leonore’s plans by instead liberating the workers with the power he generate from the “false light” of the magical Algol-Machine. His plans vary little from the Demiurge of Gnosticism, who betrays his mother Sophia by imitating her attempt to produce. But his production is by entirely unconventional means: a mixing of matter (science) and spirit (occult). Ironically, whereas the Yaldabaoth animates his creation by extracting the life force from Sophia, Robert makes his plans possible by draining Leonore of her clientele and employees. Thus, Leonore’s eventual marriage with Robert symbolizes Sophia’s entanglement in matter, viz. with the false light, because Robert only unites with Leonore in marriage after having deceived the world of his engineering genius—which is powered by the variable light of Algol, itself a “false light.” While Leonore represents Younger Sophia in the context of Robert representing the “child of chaos” who will become the Demiurge. It is no wonder, then, that Leonore perishes when Robert exposes her to the light rays in his secret Hall of Eternal Power. Symbolically, her (sacrificial) death signifies the Demiurge channeling Younger Sophia’s vital force into his creation for the sake of his delusional expansion of personal power.

On the other hand, Maria Obal’s role in this same opening scene may be understood to

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<sup>486</sup> Original: „Sagen Sie mir alles, was Sie von Ihren Leuten wissen. Von ihrer Not und von ihren Wünschen und wer sie sind.“

<sup>487</sup> Original: „Ich bin kein Spielzeug ihrer Launen! [...] Wenn es einen Weg gibt in ihrer Welt, gehe ich ihn nicht an Ihrer Hand.“

represent Elder Sophia when reading Robert as the Christos in search for his syzygy, Younger Sophia. When the radiant Leonore appears to Robert in the mines, the dark-headed Maria has been attending to Robert. She hands him a canteen and tries to comfort him by saying: “Only three hours, Robert, and we will go back to the day,”<sup>488</sup> to which Robert retorts: “For us day will never come, Maria Obal – !”<sup>489</sup> Resting on his burly shoulder, she replies: “My day is where you are, Robert – !”<sup>490</sup> Robert’s words in this dialogue reinstate the above reading of this scene as representative of the bleak existence of mankind and its denial of its own inner divinity, but the words of Maria, here Elder Sophia, identify Robert as the “true light” of the world, the Christos. (The astrological and alchemical overtones are evident.) Similarly, while Robert’s replenishment of his bodily fluids with Maria’s canteen can here likewise indicate a sort of initiation prompting the appearance of Leonore as Younger Sophia, her appearance, Maria’s motherly attendance, and Robert’s eventual mission to unite with her quite literally through marriage represents the Christos leaving the motherly care of Elder Sophia in pursuit of his syzygy. As Leonore says when first appearing to Robert: “I come down here to you as your sister!”<sup>491</sup> Thus Robert’s initiation into the Algol rays can doubly signify the Christos’s descent into matter before making Himself eligible, symbolically with the social status of an engineer, to rediscover, unite with, and redeem Younger Sophia, his divine twin.

Brennert and Köhne’s convoluted repertoire of paired characters and their antagonisms demonstrate their thorough acquaintance with Gnostic archetypes as well as

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<sup>488</sup> Original: „Noch drei Stunden, Robert, und wir fahren wieder zu Tage.“

<sup>489</sup> Original: „Uns kommt nie ein Tag, Maria Obal—!“

<sup>490</sup> Original: „Mein Tag ist, wo Du bist, Robert – !“

<sup>491</sup> Original: „Ich komme herab zu Euch als Eure Schwester!“

their playful wit in the simultaneous inversion and contradiction of traditional understandings of these archetypes' roles. For example, that Leonore Nissen would signify Younger Sophia is counterintuitive, since she maintains her royal status. That Maria Obal would signify Elder Sophia is equally contradictory, since she remains a lowly worker. Ultimately, however, one observes during the course of the film that Brennert and Köhne created characters whose identities were at times interchangeable with their doubles. Midway through the film, Robert and Leonore's children, Reginald and Magda, are depicted as the future rulers of their parent's nation. Both grow into bright, angelic adults much like their equally fair-headed parents, suggesting their roles as the Christos and Younger Sophia. Did Brennert and Köhne, then, intend Leonore to signify Elder Sophia?

This notion is at once negated by Leonore's marriage to Robert as well as an immediate development in the plot—the birth of Maria's *only child*, Peter Hell.<sup>492</sup> Though dark-haired like his mother, Peter obviously symbolizes a Christos figure when, after being shocked by a machine in Robert's factory, he pledges to his fellow workers that he will liberate them all: "I will go to Robert Herne and demand his work for all of humanity!"<sup>493</sup> Appropriately, when Peter gives his speech, it is his mother, Maria—again reaffirming her role as Elder Sophia—who urges her suffering son to petition Robert personally. In turn, when the injured Peter arrives at the opulent Herne Estate, he trespasses on the family garden where he meets Magda, the bright-headed daughter of Robert Herne. Having been 'enlightened' by the power of the Algol-Machine, Peter

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<sup>492</sup> In the course of the film, Maria marries another fellow worker who leaves her widowed by Peter's birth. This symbolism has obvious Christological significance, but also points to the idea of the Christos as the one and only son of Elder Sophia. Like the Christos, Peter is destined to leave his mother (who formerly knew the man who would later create a 'new world') in order to save his "sister" who also becomes his companion.

<sup>493</sup> Original: „Ich gehe zu Robert Herne und fordere sein Werk für die ganze Menschheit!“

doubly signifies a Gnostic messenger akin to a Luciferian spirit, telling her of the realm beyond the plastic creation and deception of her father. Peter Hell is thus the Christos who symbolically reawakens Younger Sophia—Magda, who embodies her mother’s latent recollection of the previous glory of her kingdom—of knowledge of the “true light” beyond the physical realm. Though ultimately unsuccessful in their humanitarian effort to convince the tyrannical engineer otherwise, Peter and Magda eventually flee Robert’s dominion before the malevolent Reginald—himself the embodiment of his father’s malicious will to create without regard to the psychical force imbuing his work—and his love interest, the dark-headed Yella Ward, oversee its tragic destruction.

The juxtaposition of these scenes, actions, and dialogues share no logical causality when analyzed exoterically. In Brennert and Köhne’s screenplay for *Algol*, Leonore knows nothing of the pact between the alien and Robert. Nor could Maria be considered Robert’s mother, nor Leonore his sister. In Thea von Harbou’s screenplay for *Metropolis*, Georgi’s succumbing to the temptations of the city has no apparent bearing on Freder’s penitential anguish in a mock crucifixion. Maria’s abduction and replication by Rotwang is neither rape nor the creation of a hybrid organism. Nevertheless, it is the fantastical association of these filmic details which, when read as a pneumonic sequence, reveal the Gnostic subtexts behind these two science-fiction narratives. Indeed, these and more scenes in *Algol* and *Metropolis* are fraught with allusions to Gnostic mythologies that scholars have hitherto overlooked or have erroneously interpreted as references to orthodox Christian teaching.<sup>494</sup> Thus Brennert, Köhne, and von Harbou composed their screenplays to the logic of Gnostic allegory.

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<sup>494</sup> While scholars such as Elder and Gunning have to some extent acknowledged the “Gnostic” nature of Lang and von Harbou’s filmography, none have elucidated to what extent these filmmakers were faithful to the spirit of Gnostic mythologies.

In their plots for *Algol* and *Metropolis*, these screenwriters uphold a set of basic relationships between her main characters painfully evocative of the Gnostic mythos. In composing her novel and screenplay, von Harbou undoubtedly adapted the filmic premise of *Algol*, but she as well as Brennert and Köhne must have had at their disposal numerous works on the cosmology of ancient Gnosticism as well as contemporary treatises of esoteric schools regarding their esoteric significance and symbolism. Roughly, the characters of both dramas were directly drawn from Gnostic archetypes in the following manner:

| <i>Archetype</i>                               | <i>Algol</i>                     | <i>Metropolis</i>  |
|--|----------------------------------|--|
| Elder Sophia                                   | → Maria Obal                     | Hel  |
| Demiurge                                       | → Robert Herne                   | Joh Fredersen  |
| Lucifer (Anti-Christos)                        | → Algol                          | Rotwang  |
| The Perverted “Light” of Lucifer (Anti-Sophia) | → Yella Ward                     | Machine Man  |
| Younger Sophia                                 | → Leonore Nissen/<br>Magda Herne | Maria  |
| Christos/ Divine Twin                          | → Peter Hell/<br>Reginald Herne  | Freder Fredersen/<br>Georgi                              |
|  |                                  | Rotwang  |
| Archons/Aeons                                  | → Algol-<br>Machine<br>Envoys    | Machine Man<br>Rotwang’s<br>technologies<br>Grot<br>Slim |

By employing this characterological correspondence, Brennert, Köhne, and von Harbou used plot artifices in which mirrored, mistaken, and doubled identities become the central

structuring principle for *Algol* and *Metropolis*.<sup>495</sup> But although these instances occur throughout both films with different intent and at different speeds among the characters, their dynamic rests in a modern attempt to associate this ancient spirituality and its worldview onto the experience of industrial modernism.

#### MICROCOSM, MACROCOSM

Just as modern mystics sifted from the symbols, motifs, and themes of mythologies the arcane truths of their doctrines, increasingly after the proliferation of psychoanalysis there were many *fin-de-siècle* mystics who embraced “science of the mind” as an applicable lens to make comprehensible to everyday language and thought the otherwise unconscious logic of prophecy, dreams, and clairvoyance. Aware of the erudite forerunners of psychoanalysis like the British classicist Frederic Myers and the German psychologist Carl du Prel<sup>496</sup>—both influential in formalizing psychical research—who had not abandoned their mystical reservations in the arrogant name of alleged objectivity, Hartmann, Reuss, Steiner, and their followers sought a spiritual science which envisioned the human unconscious as a hatch into transcendental forces, good and evil alike—not

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<sup>495</sup> For example, Freder has a double in Georgi and Josephat (Fredersen’s disgraced chief secretary), both who become hunted by Slim, Fredersen’s loyal spy. At the same time, Josephat—whom Freder intends to accommodate Georgi in his escape from the Worker’s City—is the counter-figure to Slim, who mistakes Georgi, wearing Freder’s clothes and riding in his car, for Freder. Likewise, during moments of bliss and anxiety, respectively, Freder and Rotwang confuse Maria and the Machine Man as the respective objects of their love. In the novel, Freder clearly conflates the virginal Maria with his deceased mother Hel, while in both the film and novel he confuses the Machine Man for Maria during his heroic pursuit of the young lady. Similarly, Rotwang goes mad in his inability to distinguish between the robot and the girl, whom he also mistakes for Hel—the object of his nostalgic lust. See esp. von Harbou, *Metropolis* 251–253, 263–265. See also Elsaesser, *Metropolis* 11–12.

<sup>496</sup> For a primary source on the psychoanalytical community’s engagement with ancient myth and spiritual practices, see Carl du Prel, *Die Mystik der Alten Griechen: Tempelschlaf, Orakel, Mysterien, Dämon des Sokrates* (Leipzig: Ernst Günther Verlag, 1888). The historian Andreas Sommer has made considerable progress in researching the rather neglected study of Anglo-German psychical research at the *fin de siècle*. See e.g. his “From Astronomy to Transcendental Darwinism: Carl du Prel (1839–1899),” *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 23 (2009): 59–68; “Tackling Taboos: From Psychopathia Sexualis to the Materialization of Dreams; Albert von Schrenck-Notzing (1862–1929),” *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 23 (2009) 299–322; “Trevor Hamilton: Immortal Longings: F.W.H. Myers and the Victorian Search for Life after Death,” *Medical History* 55 (2011): 433–435; and “Professional heresy: Edmund Gurney (1847–1888) and the Study of Hallucinations and Hypnotism,” *Medical History* 55 (2011): 383–388.

merely a repository of the repressed and animalistic drive of mankind's existence.<sup>497</sup> Far from the product of hereditary brain tissue, the species adaptation, and natural selection, for them the human mind constituted a mysterious network of sensory and extrasensory perceptions whose multilayered network were capable of reconciling all material and the psychical planes of existence.

When channeling astral knowledge for her epistemological research in the mid-1920s, Johanna van der Meulen confronted institutionalized psychology's approach to the human psyche as a poorly masked attempt by materialists to highjack the interpretative methodology of the ancient mystery schools and heterodoxies of the Western spiritual tradition:

An esoteric analysis of so-called psycho-analysis demonstrates that the latter is a quasi-academic, scientifically "psychological" assimilation of ancient, pseudo-esoteric doctrines based on sexual magic, which is like, for example, the teachings of the Orphites, Basilideans (Gnosticism), and particularly Kabbalism in the utmost intellectual and contemporary age. The empirical, strictly scientific significance of so-called psychoanalysis is debatable, because the object of its research is beyond empiricism and is therefore inaccessible with the empirical method.<sup>498</sup>

Prefiguring the scholarly ruminations of the psychologist Carl Jung, the philosopher Hans Jonas, and their most faithful students, van der Meulen's words contributed to a larger

<sup>497</sup> Steiner and Heindel were deeply intrigued by oracles, temple sleep, dream interpretation, and other aspects of the Greco-Roman and Egyptian mystery religions. Steiner, for instance, outlined at length an initiation rite of "three-and-a-half-day sleep" in which temple neophytes underwent hypnosis in order to transcend their bodies and explore the cosmos, stating that the crucified Jesus's three days in the tomb and his subsequent resurrection signified the personal transformation of such a rite. See Steiner, "The Mystical Meaning of the Mass: March 17, 1905, Cologne," *The Christian Mystery* 15-24; "The Origin of Religious Confessions and Forms of Prayer: February 17, 1907, Leipzig," ibid. esp. 36-39. See also his comments in "Lecture IV: Experiences of Initiation, The Mysteries of the Planets, the Descent of the Primeval Word; September 5, 1908," *Egyptian Myths and Mysteries* 30-31; and "Lecture XI: The Ancient Egyptian Doctrine of Evolution, The Cosmic View of the Organs and their Coarsening in Modern Times; September 13, 1908," ibid. esp. 75-81.

<sup>498</sup> Original: „Eine esoterische Analyse der sogenannten Psycho-Analyse zeigt, daß letztere eine quasi akademische wissenschaftlich „psychologische“ Anpassung von uralten, pseudo-esoterischen Lehren, die auf sexueller Magie beruhen, wie z. B. Ophitismus, Basilidianismus (Gnosticismus) und vorzugsweise Kabbalismus an die heutige intellektuellstische Zeit ist. Die empirische, streng wissenschaftliche Bedeutung der sogen. Psychoanalyse ist fraglich, weil das Objekt der Forschung über-empirisch und deshalb für die empirische Methode unerreichbar ist.“ Van der Meulen, *Buch IV: Das Große Zeichen; Arcana Sapientiae* (München: Herold-Verlag GmbH, 1914/1933): 49.

discourse about the authentic spiritual significance of modern psychology. Her claim that psychoanalysis based its purportedly naturalist science on Gnostic tradition was shared by other prominent *fin-de-siècle* mystics.<sup>499</sup> Similarly, *Algol* and *Metropolis* abound with conflicts, relationships, and subplots entirely redolent of Gnostic mythologies but which have in scholarship been treated in purely psychoanalytical terms. Indeed, the screenwriters and directors obviously recognized the applicability of contemporary psychological theories in their cinematic dramas, but the manner in which they approached popular psychoanalytical concepts underscores more than the familiar neuroses and obsessions of postwar German culture. More than sexual tension, wish fulfillment, and generational conflict in a temporal sense, the artifices in *Algol* and *Metropolis* directly allude to a most existential dimension of Gnostic myth.

#### *As Above, So Below*

As van der Meulen's defense of occult doctrine makes clear, the resurgence of Gnostic scriptures proffered the esoteric schools an opportunity to employ the apocalyptic narratives of Gnostic myths to investigate the spiritual experiences of their predecessors and to navigate their own spiritual missions for the future. If myth implied a timeless factor in the human condition beyond morality or values, then in essence their parabolic wisdom evoked a superhuman dimension beyond the psychosomatic limitations of mundane ordinary experience. After all, notable analysts including Sigmund Freud and Otto Rank were, despite their professed hostility to all forms of spirituality, adept in antiquarianism, and their theories were highly dependent on the mythologies of Persia

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<sup>499</sup> This psychoanalytical intrigue surrounding Gnostic scriptures was not exclusive to German-speaking mystics. G.R.S. Mead listed lost, fragmented, and newfound Gnostic texts including *The Gospel of Perfection*, *The Gospel of Eve*, *The Questions of Mary*, *Concerning the Offspring of Mary*, *The Gospel of Philip*, *The Gospel according to Thomas*, and *The Gospel according to the Egyptians*, all which he observed possessed a strong "mystical, psychological, devotional, and exegetical character" (198).

and Babylon, Hellenistic mystery religions, and the Talmudic traditions in formulating their universalistic agendas for mental health.<sup>500</sup> Before discussing further the applicability of psychoanalysis in *Algol* and *Metropolis*, however, an explanation of how scholars prioritized Gnostic myth as an understanding of modernity must be given.

While the public in general may not have ascribed this mystical label to the feeling of the era, it is important to note that intellectuals in Germany during the 1920s and 1930s, highly familiar with the classical as well as their own modern cultural milieus, were quite conscious of a Gnostic vein in postwar modernism. In fact, the psychoanalyst Carl Jung and the young philosophy student Hans Jonas went so far as to draw an explicit correlations between daily experience of the world and life in industrial modernism and the interior landscape of ancient Gnosticism. Both argued that, to a greater or lesser degree, the inhabitants of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe restructured Christendom into a technologically driven society whose perception of reality had inadvertently elicited, yet by no means replicated, the mythic worldview of Gnosticism in late antiquity. For these inhabitants of urban Germany, it was obvious that Gnosticism formed the cultural matrix of industrial modernism itself.

In his initial work during the late 1920s and early 1930s, Jonas also managed to break into the interior landscape of ancient Gnosticism by demythologizing the ancient philosophy in order to discover its essential core experience of the world and life which Gnostic mythology concealed. He then read that core experience through existentialist

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<sup>500</sup> See e.g. Gregory C. Richter and E. James Lieberman's translation of Otto Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero: A Psychological Exploration of Myth* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1909/2004). A good discussion of Freud's conception of the transcendental, including religion, the occult, and mysticism, is Michael Palmer, *Freud and Jung on Religion* (London: Routledge, 1997).

optics he had “acquired at the school of Heidegger.”<sup>501</sup> In later research, he would reverse this optical lens to consider existentialism through the prism of Gnosticism, leaving no secret about the affinities he noticed between ancient Gnosticism and Western modernity.

By illuminating the modern existential character of the ancient Gnostics and the Gnostic character of secular modern nihilists, Jonas offered two key points of comparison. First, he noted that both worldviews share the central experience of exile, homelessness, and estrangement in the world, to which the self responds with dread or anxiety over its captivity in the alien realm. Second, the Gnostic profession of an alien God absent from the cosmos is comparable to the observation that existentialists inherited from Nietzsche: “God is dead.” Whether absent or dead, this vanishing deity has left behind an implied vacuum of absolute reference points, draining life not only of its purpose but all value systems and moral standards as well. However, Jonas emphasized, the Supreme Being, the alien God in Gnosticism, ultimately held out an opportunity for eternal redemption through the divine spark’s return to its celestial source. The dead God of the existentialists only offered “the absolute vacuum, the really bottomless pit.”<sup>502</sup>

Between 1918 and 1926, Jung worked out his theory of individuation and the self as the goal of psychic development. Jung asserted that second-century Gnostics encountered the unconscious in their personal revelations and were able to render the human experience in their myths.<sup>503</sup> Jung thus explicated his three-stage psychological theory as a Gnostic-inspired myth in order to illustrate psychic redemption by self-

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<sup>501</sup> Cited in Grimstad 55.

<sup>502</sup> For a thorough analysis of Jonas’ correlation of Gnosticism and existentialism, see Grimstad 55-57.

<sup>503</sup> Like the scholars of comparative religion, Jung sought in the ancient Gnostics a key to the fundamental patterns shared by all ancient religious traditions throughout the ancient world.

knowledge.<sup>504</sup> In the first stage, the differentiated ego emerges out of the primordial consciousness as a psychic equivalent of the Demiurge. Second, the ego forgets its original home and in its blindness becomes alienated from itself. Believing itself autonomous and powerful, the ego receives a sort of wake-up call when the unconscious reveals itself through a shattering experience that breaks through the ego's shell of complacency. With the ego's memory of its fall into the great abyss of ignorance, the individual enters the third and final stage: the reunion of the alienated poles of the psyche. Thus, in the immanent realm of Jung's psychology, the Gnostic return to the transcendental "Pleroma of the self" restores the fullness of being within the psyche.<sup>505</sup>

Early in his career, Jung had resorted to broad readings in archaeology and mythology for his dream analysis, later arriving at his pivotal theory of an impersonal, phylogenetic unconscious in his first major work *Wandlung und Symbole der Libido* (Symbols of Transformation, 1912). In an assertion strangely similar to van der Meulen's perspective, Jung upheld the ancient Gnostics as the earliest forerunners to modern psychologists who also encountered the unconscious in their mythic revelations. While Jung became both hailed and rebuked as a Gnostic, he denied all such labels. Nevertheless, his praise of ancient Gnosticism as a remedy to the alienation of modernity is unstinting. He would later write that Gnosticism provided in crude form a spiritual purpose that had been lost for centuries. It was

a belief in the efficacy of individual revelation and individual knowledge. This belief was rooted in the proud feeling of man's affinity with the gods, subject to no human law, and so overmastering that it may even subdue the gods by the

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<sup>504</sup> Many contemporaries rightly accused Jung of inventing his psychological theory in the form of a new Gnostic myth, leading them to either hail or rebuke him as a modern Gnostic. But Jung rejected this label (Grimstad 48-49).

<sup>505</sup> For a more thorough summary of Jung's theory of individuation, its relation to ancient Gnosticism, and its context in Weimar culture, see Grimstad 48-51.

sheer power of gnosis.<sup>506</sup>

Thus Jung crystalized in this passage his understanding of Gnosticism as an extreme form of individualism, lofty and lawless. Charged with its Faustian proportions, Jung's theory bears uncanny similarity to the Luciferian impulse embraced by contemporary mystics in their quest for supersensible knowledge.<sup>507</sup>

For Jung and Jonas, the essence of the Gnostic worldview was compatible with the ennui, listlessness, and plasticity of twentieth-century industrial modernism. Working separately in their respective professions, both the psychologist and the philosopher postulated that the contemporary revival of Gnosticism sprung from modernity's innate tendency to alienate, estrange, and provoke the individual to a point his must come to terms with his constructed sense of reality and his ultimately bleak, superficial, disenfranchised, and manipulated state of existence before discovering, if at all, his authentic identity.<sup>508</sup> Ironically, the constructed environment of industrial modernity forces the individual to admit the deception—the urbanized, regimented, commodified lifestyle—of an existence that on the surface appears to be natural. While Jung the psychologist treated Gnosticism as the definitive testament of mankind's eternal rapport with transcendental forces, Jonas the philosopher stripped it of all metaphysics in order to uncover its phenomenology.<sup>509</sup> Yet in spite of these quite different elaborations, Jung and Jonas both turned to the dualist religious philosophy of Gnosticism in order to locate

<sup>506</sup> Cited in Grimstad 48. Steiner often indicated that this ancient desire to surpass the gods was taken quite literally in Greco-Roman mystery religions. See his comments in "Lecture II: The Mysteries and their Wisdom," *Christianity as Mystical Fact* esp. 30-33.

<sup>507</sup> See Steiner's discussion of childhood and puberty in "The Children of Lucifer: The Step from Love Based on Kinship to Spiritual Love; April 4, 1906, Düsseldorf," *The Christian Mystery* 114-116; see also his "Lucifer the Light Bearer of Light, Christ the Bringer of Love," *The Christian Mystery* 110-111. See also Grimstad's discussion on 48-49.

<sup>508</sup> Grimstad argues this point in "Chapter II: On Gnostic Modernity and Modern Gnosticisms," esp. 48-63.

<sup>509</sup> Grimstad 78-79.

the earliest precursor of a very contemporary way of experiencing the world. The far-reaching ideological ties inherent within the revival of Gnosticism is reflected in no small part by the scholarly writings of Jung and Jonas, who composed their theories in their respective fields with little to no consultation with one another regarding their opinions.

These ruminations provide a collective expository for a firsthand Gnostic ‘experience’ in Weimar culture and thus help gauge the relevance of this cultural milieu in the postwar occult movement. Whether or not every postwar European around this time would have agreed that everyday life ‘felt,’ as it were, Gnostic is irrelevant; the point is that these intellectuals posited clear analogies between their own time and an ancient cultic identity whose familiarity would not have been lost on a public. As objective intellectuals who studied Gnosticism, Jung and Jonas could certainly speak with authority about the relevance of this ancient worldview in urban Europe during the early twentieth century. Because Jung and Jonas both propounded independent theories to explain the essential core experience of Gnosticism in industrial modernism, their individual outlooks affected their interpretive ideological applications of Gnosticism. That they conceived their theories predominantly in Germany during the 1920s seems all the more convenient, since the immediate postwar environment, as seen in the sociopolitical commentary of German Expressionist science fiction and fantasy, was characterized by paranoia of conspiratorial groups, insecurities in employment and the economy, and an overall feeling of distrust, disgust, and disillusionment with oneself and one’s environment.<sup>510</sup> Wars and rumors of wars, pestilence, frenzy, and murder were no dry biblical prophecy during the first years of Weimar Germany. They were a grim day-to-day cultural

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<sup>510</sup> For the immediate postwar hardships in Germany, see Part II and Part III of Detlev Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik: Krisenjahre der Klassischen Moderne* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1987). Future research will connect more associations between the postwar cynicism, disillusionment, trauma, and Gnosticism.

reality.<sup>511</sup>

By the time Jung and Jonas had formulated their theories, that the liberation of the Gnostic Sophia could readily be taken as a metaphor for the soul's plight and eventual transcendence had long been obvious to the leaders of the *fin-de-siècle* esoteric schools. For them, the term *soul* refers to both 1) the representation of mankind's aggregate "World Soul," the feminine aspect at work through all grades of matter and consciousness, or macrocosm; and 2) each individual monad, or microcosm, viz. the disintegrated part of the universal "Spirit of Life." Understanding that in Gnostic mythology these dual manifestations of "soul" can be understood as referring to Younger and Elder Sophia, respectively,<sup>512</sup> modern mystics including Heindel, Steiner, and van der Meulen concurred that such allegories depict multiple realities simultaneously. Epistemologically, they did not find these depictions mutually exclusive; rather, they understood that, from an esoteric perspective, such depictions complement and supplement each other. For this reason, these mystics argued for the intrapsychical, or even a psychological, interpretation of such myths and the metaphysical or theological.<sup>513</sup>

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<sup>511</sup> German Expressionists derived professional inspiration from their salient memories of this tumultuous era. Fritz Lang, for example, often recalled this story about a postwar image that inspired his directorial work: "Crime prospered. From time to time some loner tried to stop this witches' sabbath [*sic.*]. One morning there appeared wall posters throughout Berlin showing a half-naked voluptuous woman in the arms of a skeleton with the caption: 'Berlin – you are dancing with Death.' But who cared? After four years of war, Death had lost its terror. /Religion? God? He had been sent to peddle his heavenly wares elsewhere. /In such an atmosphere of 'And Devil take the hindmost' there thrives a constant, ever-present yearning for the fantastic, the mysterious, the macabre, for the strangling terror of the dark." Discussing the first half the 1920s in Germany, he asserted that the demonic filmographies of Murnau, Wegener, and Galeen would not have been the same without the hellish collective experience of total war and societal decay. Cited in Lotte H. Eisner, *Fritz Lang* (London: Da Capo Press, 1976/1986): 95-96; 96-97. A recently published work explaining the worldview of Expressionist filmmakers in the immediate aftermath of the Great War is Steve Choe's *Afterlives: Allegories of Film and Mortality in Early Weimar Germany* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2014).

<sup>512</sup> See e.g. Mead, *Fragments* 372-374; and Swiney 15. Further research must investigate to what extent twentieth-century mystics associated Gnosticism with psychoanalysis. That scholars like Jung and Jonas could draw likeminded conclusions independently of one another is all the more significant, because their concordance demonstrates the extent to which a self-conscious identification with Gnosticism—or at least a industrial-age Gnosticism that resembled its predecessor—was widespread in the aggregate experience of modernity, not exclusive to the agendas of esoteric schools like Theosophy, Rosicrucianism, Anthroposophy, Ordo Templi Orientis, or Fraternitas Saturni.

<sup>513</sup> This argument can, of course, be found in the works of professional psychologists including Carl du Prel and Albert von Schrenck-Notzing. But it is found also in treatises such as those by mystics like Johanna van der Meulen. Arguing

*As Within, So Without*

Hans Werckmeister's *Algol* and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* were not conceived by their screenwriters as mere fantasies about technocracies. Rather, Hans Brennert, Fridel Köhne, and Thea von Harbou based their plots, characters, and motifs on Gnostic mythologies, especially those found in the *Pistis Sophia* embraced by *fin-de-siècle* esoteric schools in German-speaking Europe. In order to portray the predicament of Younger Sophia, the tyranny of the Demiurge, the mission of the Christos, and other spiritual entities in their complex mythological systems, these filmmakers were undoubtedly aware of the mass discourse of ancient Gnostic sects, which, reiterated in societies including Theosophy, Anthroposophy, Rosicrucianism, often united and reconciled the recognitions of monotheism and polytheism, as well as of theism, deism, and pantheism.<sup>514</sup> This multifariousness explains why Europeans who likened their occult philosophy to Gnosticism, with their similar cosmogonies and anthropogonies seeking to unravel for the initiate mystical self-knowledge, appear to the outside spectator to be fraught incompatible truth claims and yet fully embraced contemporary theories in

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that the primal drive of human consciousness is, far from a respository for repressions, a threshold to the divine, she wrote: „In der elementalischen Welt und in der ihr entsprechenden Hülle des Menschen ist die Denkkraft nicht analysierend und combinierend tätig, sondern einigend. Die Denkkraft wirkt da wie das Aufleuchten eines bestimmten Lichtes, das Anschlagen eines gewissen Tones; und diese rufen aus dem Innern gleichgestimmter Wesen das gleiche Licht, den gleichen Ton hervor, wodurch die innere Einheit bestätigt wird. Mit dein analysierenden, an den physischen Körper gebundenen Denken die niedere Seelenkraft, als Hüllennatur im Menschen erforschen zu wollen ist ebenso grotesk und töricht, wie den Versuch zu machen, mit der Kraft der Wellen und Strömungen des Elementenmeeres ein physisches Mühlrad in Bewegung zu setzen. Deshalb ist einer der schlimmsten Auswüchse der heutigen Zeit die sogenannte Psycho-Analyse, weil hier mit der an das physische Gehirn gebundenen Denkkraft das Leben der niederen Psyche zerstückelt und analysiert und dann zu einer schauerlich, grotesken Gesamtheit combiniert und zusammengeflickt oder zusammengesetzt wird. Die wahre Psyche kommt dabei überhaupt nicht in Betracht, weil diese der genannten Denkkraft unerreichbar bleibt, da letztere nur in dem unbewußten elementalischen Leben der menschlichen Hüllennatur wühlt. Kein Wunder, daß diese analysierende Denkkraft zunächst auf den untersten Schlamm des Elementenmeeres stößt und die unsauberen Ergebnisse der Forschung ans Tageslicht bringt. Weil aber die heutige Menschheit nicht versteht, mit welchen Mitteln hier gewirkt wird und wo die Unrichtigkeit einer solchen sogenannten Wissenschaft (!) zu finden ist, so können solche fatalen Irrtümer vorkommen, daß geglaubt wird, man habe es hier mit einer positiven Heilmethode der Psyche zu tun. Die wahre Psyche unterliegt keinen Krankheiten, und das, was hier unter dem Namen Psyche analysiert wird, ist etwas, was sich auf die ungeläuterte niedere Natur und die mit ihr verbundenen unbewußten Triebe und Instinkte bezieht.“ Van der Meulen, *Buch IV* 49-50.

<sup>514</sup> For the influences of syncretism and paganism on Gnosticism in the context of Hellenistic Greece, see King, *What is Gnosticism?* 48-52. King also discusses attempts by Adolf Harnack and, later, Han Jonas to understand how Gnosticism could work to reconcile contradictory religious sympathies on 67-69, 135-137.

scientific, medical, psychoanalytical thought.<sup>515</sup> Likewise, this diverse approach to quasi-Gnostic spiritualities enabled these filmmakers with a poetic license in their cinematic adaptation of these allegories.

If Brennert, Köhne, and von Harbou fashioned *Algol* and *Metropolis* on Gnostic allegory, then by no means were their modernist adaptations limited to shallow exoteric interpretation. Indeed, both these films evoke as much about the inner psychic quest for transcendence as the outer experience of industrial modernism.<sup>516</sup> For this reason, when writing *Metropolis* von Harbou demanded her audience read its message *allegorically*, not politically, socially, or morally. When sublimated through the narrative lens of Gnosticism, the mythical Herne Land and Metropolis signify within themselves the macrocosmic World Soul *and* the microcosmic monad as adapted from Gnostic thought by Theosophy, Rosicrucianism, Anthroposophy, and other esoteric schools. According to their allegorical readings of ancient scriptures, every entity, theme, and motif mirrors or reflects something else.<sup>517</sup> For instance, each individual's personality and human shape is

<sup>515</sup> Compare and contrast, for example, the hostile Germanic nationalism and Nordic paganism of Guido von List and Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels with the universalism and philosophical monism of Rudolf Steiner and Franz Hartmann. While these researchers certain took vastly different positions on the interpretation of mystical self-knowledge and Gnostic mythologies, all four attended the same conferences, referred to many of the same arcane texts, and published their research—whether medical, biological, philosophical, or downright theosophical—in the same occult periodicals. The rival of Gnosticism proved as flexible as its predecessor in accommodating the entire spectrum of veneration. See similar discussion in Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore, MA: John Hopkins University Press, 2004): 21.

<sup>516</sup> Because *Algol* and *Metropolis* reiterate the identical Gnostic myth, viz. the *Pistis Sophia*, the latter is chosen here not only because of its more explicit utilization of psychoanalysis but also because of the extensive scholarship surrounding this film. In addition to its inferior aesthetic quality, Werkmeister's *Algol* was considered a lost film between the 1930s and the 1980s; therefore, scholarly investigations regarding its inception and the individuals behind its production remain exceedingly sparse. Only further investigation can uncover this undervalued film, whose science-fiction premise was the chief impetus for Lang and von Harbou's *Metropolis*.

<sup>517</sup> As a certain „Fra Tedesco“ noted in the introduction to Johanna van der Meulen's first occult treatise: „Die Bücher des Intermediarius sind keine leichte Lektüre; sie wollen es auch gar nicht sein. Sie sind in langen Jahren ernster Kontemplation und selbstloser Versenkung in die unergründlichen Tiefen der im Geiste unmittelbarsten Christentums erschauten Welt- und Schöpfungsgeheimnisse erstanden, während welcher Zeit dem begnadeten Menschen, der seine Worte und seine Feder für die Niederschrift zur Verfügung stellte, für sich selbst aber daraus nicht den mindesten Ruhm sucht und daher namenlos bleiben will, sichtbarlich ein hoher Führer zur Seite stand./ Diese Entstehungsgeschichte bringt es wohl mit sich, daß die Bücher des Intermediarius nicht für die Vielen geschrieben sind, die heute nach modisch gewordener religiöser Literatur greifen. [...] / Diese Wenigen, die zu den ‚Stillen im Lande‘ gehören, will Intermediarius aufsuchen, um sie einzuladen, ihm in das noch so wenig erschlossene geistige

seemingly unique, yet this existence, far from exclusive to the individual, bespeaks a more comprehensive entity—i.e., an archetype, such as those discussed above—in whose image and likeness that individual exists. In turn, that individual's characteristics, thoughts, emotions, and sensations are reflected in the entire human experience pervading space and time.<sup>518</sup> As in psychoanalytical dream interpretation, entities portrayed in Gnostic scriptures can then be scrutinized as both subject *and* object simultaneously. Not coincidentally, this ambivalent self-reflexivity was one of the distinct stylistics embraced by the German Expressionists.<sup>519</sup>

Hence, rather than favoring one scriptural interpretation or another, the hermeneutics of Gnostic exegesis promote one *and* the other.<sup>520</sup> In writing *Algol* and *Metropolis*, therefore, Brennert, Köhne, and von Harbou added their voices to a growing chorus that immersed the modern world with this ancient Gnostic trope while speculating on mankind's destiny.<sup>521</sup> Dependent on a highly nuanced sense of filmic space and characterological transformations, the Gnostic interpretation is correspondingly ambivalent with its contradictions, paradoxes, and ironies.

The hideous plots and visuals of German Expressionism underscore the sinister

Reich der wahren christlichen Esoterik zu folgen, damit sie sich als Menschen in ihrer ewigen Bestimmung zunächst selbst erkennen und ihr Erdenleben im Sinne der neugewonnenen Erkenntnisse gestalten“ (Van der Meulen, *Buch I* 7-8). Undoubtedly, a similarly arcane elitism greets the reader of von Harbou's epigram to *Metropolis*.

<sup>518</sup> Metaphorically, one may liken this transcendentalist reality to a hall of mirrors, in which one entity is reflected in various forms and realities.

<sup>519</sup> In Weimar Expressionist film, especially, a fluidity of forms envelops the *mise-en-scène*—inanimate objects become imbued with demonic vitalism and conscious entities are reduced to objects. For a broad overview of Expressionist stylizations, see *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1952/1973). For distinguishing characteristics of Weimar cinema as well as their relation to psychoanalysis, see “Caligari’s Family: Expressionism, Frame Tales, and Master Narratives” in Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany’s Historical Imaginary* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000): 61-105, esp. 71-75.

<sup>520</sup> See Mead’s apologetic for the “comparative science of religion” and its methodology in *Fragments* 8-11; note the theosophical overtones in his call to unified religious thought. See also Swiney 6-8.

<sup>521</sup> True to Gnostic exegesis as well as the Expressionistic genre, in her prolix prose von Harbou especially portrayed her own futuristic city itself as both object and subject: „die große Metropolis, die im Lichttanz schwang und eine Tänzerin war“ (von Harbou, *Metropolis* 48).

overtones of Gnosticism. Like Expressionist cinema, various excerpts from Gnostic scriptures seem to justify, and at times promote, carnal and bestial behavior, but such devaluing of the psychical existence of humanity undermines the inherently metaphorical nature of these narratives, themes, and motifs. Why, for example, must the feminine character be always portrayed as the victim and the masculine as the rescuer? One may assert, conversely, why must the masculine character be always depicted as the abductor, the exploiter, the delusional tyrant, while the woman represents pervasive wisdom, psychically intuition, and unconditional love? (After all, in keeping with Gnostic symbolism, the women in these films fall into trouble *because* they are ‘wise.’) But such criticism overlooks the characteristically crude, and often morbid, frankness the Expressionists themselves embraced in addressing grim realities of social and gender equality. Not unlike their commentary on social injustices, then, they observed that women are typically abducted, abused, and exploited, as well as rescued and protected, by men, who in turn generally have the physical strength to accomplish all of these tasks.

Like the Gnostics of Hellenistic Rome and the German-speaking mystics of *fin-de-siècle* Europe, these postwar filmmakers observed, portrayed, and lamented the absurdity of earthly existence. They observed that *all* human beings are faced with a universal condition, not necessarily abused by any person or persons about whom one may heap blame, but by the very condition in which the human being finds himself in physical existence. In this way, the worldview of the German Expressionists shares profound correlations with Gnosticism, since the recognition of this truth is of central importance to understanding Gnosticism. Surely there exists within literal reality—as portrayed in the narratives of Gnostic texts of Hellenistic Rome and the science fiction film of Weimar

Germany—certain deplorable, even tyrannical, people in positions of great power. To escape such actual problem causes is certainly the better part of wisdom, but beyond such exotericism there remains the simple existential condition in which the individual finds himself, and this condition itself is a great problem to the human predicament. In the Weimar Republic, where blame and guilt bred with hyperinflation, revolution, and other, more enduring reminders of military defeat, these filmmakers understood the absurdity of industrial modernism. Blaming is of little use, if any, and without this recognition there is not even a beginning of gnosis.<sup>522</sup>

As the term Expressionism suggests, these filmmakers depicted widespread contemporary crises with a genre aesthetic language exhibiting little regard to moral standards or logical solutions. In this way, the metaphors in both Gnostic texts as well as German Expressionism are justified, since the creative minds behind both used images and symbols common to the human experience and therefore meaningful. For the objective researcher, it is significant to remember that Gnostic metaphors *precede* the physical. The primacy of the essential allegorical nature of numerous Expressionist films including *Algol* and *Metropolis* cannot be understated, since this transcendentalist primacy is central to understanding Weimar science fiction within the criticism of myth, not literalism or historicism. Indeed, further research can easily examine how almost all Lang and von Harbou's Weimar-era films pull directly from occult doctrine Gnostic mythologies. The next chapter attempts to initiate what should become extensive scholarly investigation.

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<sup>522</sup> It may be said, then, that the Gnostics encouraged one to look vertically for the source of human suffering rather than seeking blame horizontally among humans, all who suffer regardless their social, political, or economic status.



Fig. 4.1: After a reclusive a year studying the occult technology of the Algol-Machine, Robert Herne writes his beloved: "Maria! The year has passed. Tomorrow I open the Bios-Works. Call me and I'll come for you once again."<sup>523</sup> Maria Obal, embittered by the separation, does not reply. Calloused by her decision, Robert throws himself all the more vigorously into his endeavors. Consequently, his will to amass power supersedes his original intent to liberate his fellow miners. After marrying Leonore Nissen, he becomes a tyrant.



Fig. 4.3: William Blake's signature Demiurge, Urizen, was indubitably a model influence on Lang's imagery for Joh Fredersen, who creates and constrains his city-state, Metropolis, which throughout the film exists as a sort of universe within itself.



Fig. 4.2: Visibly shaken after having experienced the explosion in the subterranean Machine Halls, Freder awes: "Your majestic city, Father – and you, the head of this city – and all of us in the city's light... --." Pointing to a towering cityscape of high-rises, zigzagging trusses, and staggered skyscrapers, he asks: "...And where are the people whose hands built your city ---?" The patriarch callously replies that they are "where they belong." Overcome with an expression of prophetic horror, Freder asks: "And if those in the depths rise up against you...?"<sup>524</sup>



Fig. 4.4: Jealously guarding his Hall of Eternal Power, Robert Herne secretly treats its ankh-like key with exceeding caution, carrying in his suit like a totem. As discussed in the upcoming chapter the shape of this key and its purpose holds esoteric significance.

<sup>523</sup> Original: „Maria! Das Jahr ist um. Ich eröffne morgen die Bios-Werke. Rufe mich und ich hole Dich,/ Noch einmal— Eure Robert.“

<sup>524</sup> Original: „Deine herrliche Stadt, Vater – und Du das Hirn dieser Stadt – und wir alle im Licht dieser Stadt... --,/ ....und wo sind die Menschen, deren Hände Deine Stadt erbauten--?“/ „Wo sie hingehören....“ [...] „Und wenn die in der Tiefe aufstehen gegen Dich?“



Fig. 4.5: Realizing that her estranged husband has concealed the prototype of the Algol-Machine in a hidden chamber of their mansion, Leonore Herne exclaims, quite ironically: "Curses and magic are in your handiwork. Reveal to me your secret at last!"<sup>525</sup> Taken aback by her intrusion, Robert slams the chamber door and slings his wife to the floor. "Only one will find out – my heir Reginald!" the patriarch exclaims. Withdrawing alone to his Hall of Eternal Power, he turns a dial on the main generator in self-exultation: "One turn of my hand, and all gear wheels stand still. I and my kind – the masters of the earth!"<sup>526</sup> In *Algol*, expansion in egotistic power follows domestic abuse in the same way the Demiurge's creation of the physical realm follows his abuse of Younger Sophia.



Fig. 4.6: Maria's plight in the Workers' City—and later her endangerment in the cathedral—lead to her signaling great clamorous sounds, viz. the gong and the bell. Both times, she acts as the desperate Younger Sophia calling out for the help of the Christos. Accordingly, Freder is alerted both times and comes to her rescue.

<sup>525</sup> Original: „Es ist Fluch und Zauber in Deinem Werk. Offenbare mir endlich sein Geheimnis!“

<sup>526</sup> Original: „Nur einer wird es erfahren – mein Erbe Reginald!“ [...] „Ein Druck von meiner Hand, und alle Räder der Welt stehen still. Ich und mein Geschlecht – Die Herren der Erde!“

CHAPTER FIVE  
ASCENT THROUGH THE HEAVENS

One cannot write extensively about Fritz Lang and Thea von Harbou's *Metropolis* without mention of the occult.<sup>527</sup> Even before its grandiose opening vision of the prototypical ultramodern city, its epigram evoked notions of esotericism and enlightenment. As discussed in the last chapter, this subtext can be readily understood within the hermeneutics of Gnostic mythology. When further investigated from this perspective, Lang and von Harbou's story about a futuristic dystopia reveals itself an allegory about the inner illumination of the human psyche. As a heuristic, the filmmakers based their visual composition and scenarios on the twelve-fold path of the tropical zodiac. Deriving their assessment from common knowledge of astrology promulgated by both scholars such as the Pan-Babylonians as well as the leaders of esoteric schools, this director and screenwriter imbued their film with a mutually reinforcing references to Gnosticism, astrology, and alchemy from ancient to medieval cultures.

In her novel von Harbou began the opening scene with a strange description of stars and planets, which, though not included in the screenplay, presage the film's theme of the continual recurrence of the past as well as the human will to defy fate. She described the young protagonist Freder who, wrapped in ecstasy at his organ, "yielded himself up to the glowing moisture which dazzled him"—

Above him, the vault of heaven in lapis lazuli... Hovering therein, the twelve-fold mystery, the signs of the zodiac in gold... Set higher above them, the seven crowned ones: the planets... High above all a silver-shining bevy of stars: the

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<sup>527</sup> A few scholarly works thoroughly treating occultism in the film *Metropolis* include William Collins Donahue, "The Shadow Play of Religion in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*," *New England Review* 24, no. 4 (2003): 207-221; Peter Dolegenos, "The Star on C.A. Rotwang's Door: Turning Kracauer on its Head," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 25, 2 (Summer 1997): 68-75; Anton Kaes, "*Metropolis*: City, Cinema, Modernity," in Timothy O. Benson (ed.), *Expressionist Utopias: Paradise, Metropolis, Architectural Fantasy* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1993): 146-165.

universe. Before the bedewed eyes of the organ-player, to his music, the stars began the solemn, mighty dance.<sup>528</sup>

Freder's vision continues, describing how the rhythm of the stars manifests his vision of "the austere countenance of the virgin," Maria, whose description parallels that of the celestial Madonna in the Apocalypse of St. John. Unlike the prologue for her husband's film, which first surveys the two tiers of this futuristic city before turning to Freder, von Harbou began her novel with a psychically tortured Freder who, having already encountered Maria earlier that day in the Eternal Gardens, has felt himself thrown into existential despair and locked himself in his bedroom at his father's house. Eventually awakening from the vision of his ascent up the dome and past the stars above him, the young engineer knows he must recover this mysterious young woman coming from beyond the walls of the Club of Sons, who has beckoned him to her.

If the symbolism concerning the Christos, the Younger Sophia, and other apocalyptic overtones is obvious from the beginning of von Harbou's novel, then so are the astrological significances entailed in Gnostic doctrine. As Freder's soul projects itself outside his body, he sees the planet below him shake with terror, floods overtaking dry land and fires rising from rifted precipices. All life on the planet is reduced to cinders:

Then, from the grey, scattered ashes, on trembling wings unspeakably beautiful and solitary, rose a bird with jeweled feathers. It uttered a plaintive cry. No bird which ever lived could have mourned so agonizingly.

It hovered above the ashes of the completely ruined earth. It hovered hither and thither, not knowing where to settle. It hovered above the grave of the sea and above the corpse of the earth. Never, since the blasphemous angel fell from

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<sup>528</sup> Original: „Er war den Tränen so nahe wie nie in seinem Leben, und in einer seligen Hilflosigkeit unterwarf er ich dem glühend Feuchten, das ihn blendete. Über ihm das Gewölbe des Himmels aus Lapislazuli; darin schwebend, zwölffaches Geheimnis, die Tierkreisgestalten, von Gold. Höher geordnet, über ihnen sieben Gekrönte: die Planeten. Hoch über allem ein silbern strahlendes Tausend-Gestirn: das Weltall./ Vor den betauten Augen des Orgelspielers begannen die Sterne nach seiner Musik den feierlich mächtigen Tanz.“ Thea von Harbou. *Metropolis* (Berlin: August Scherl Verlag GmbH, 1926): 9.

heaven to hell, had the air heard such a cry of despair.

Then, from the solemn, mighty dance of the stars, one detached itself and neared the dead earth. Its light was gentler than moonlight and more imperious than the light of the sun. Among the music of the spheres it was the most heavenly note. It enveloped the plaintive bird in its loving glow; it was as strong as a deity, calling: “To me.... to me –!”<sup>529</sup>

As her prologue overflows with prolix prose, von Harbou alluded to the will of the two primal syzygies longing to reunite with one another from either side of the cosmos.

Elsewhere in her novel heavenly bodies play a significant role, but only these opening lines tell that Freder finds refuge in them because of his awareness of their presence.<sup>530</sup>

Based on evidence in both her book and her screenplay, by alluding to Freder’s conscious experience of supersensible interplanetary influences, von Harbou intended the prologue to her novel as an occult cue confirming the esoteric significance behind her Gnostic epigram.

Ironically, however, explicit mention of the zodiac, let alone its revelatory influence on Freder, occurs nowhere in the film. Nevertheless, Lang and von Harbou collaborated to structure its entire plot clearly mimics the annual procession of the sun through the

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<sup>529</sup> Original: „Da, aus der graustiebenden Asche, erhob sich auf zitternden Flügeln, unsäglich schön und einsam, ein Vogel mit Edelstein-Federn. Er stieß eine klagenden Schrei aus. Kein Vogel, der jemals auf Erde lebte, hatte so süß und so qualvoll zu klagen gewußt./ Er schwebte über dem Grabe des Meeres und über dem Leichnam der Erde. Niemals, seit die frevelnden Engel vom Himmel zur Hölle stürzten, hatte die Luft solchen Schrei der Verzweiflung gehört./ Da, aus dem feierlich-mächtigen Tanz der Sterne, löste einer sich los und nahte der toten Erde. Sein Licht war sanfter als das Mondlicht und gebieterischer als das Licht der Sonne. Aus der Musik der Sphären war er der himmlischste Ton. Er hüllte den klagenden Vogel in sein liebes Leuchten ein; das war stark wie eine Gottheit und rief: Zu mir... zu mir –!“ Von Harbou, *Metropolis* 10. The Gnostic significance regarding the reconciliation of macrocosm and microcosm is evident. Compare this scene with Andrzej Niemojewski’s investigation of Jesus’s baptism in John’s Gospel and Ganymede’s union with the swan in Greek mythology: „Wenn der vom Adler in die Höhe gehobene Ganymedes Wassermann mit seinem Haupte kulminieren wird, er, der hier den das Wasser ausgießenden Johannes den Täufer darstellt, wird im Westen, wo die Milchstraße sich teilt, das Horn des Heiles, Jesus, also der Neumond, erscheinen. Zugleich wird oben der Schwan sichtbar sein, jener heilige Geist in der Gestalt der Taube. Unter den Sternbilder wird Jesus [sic.] der Schlangenmann-Asklepios vertreten, der den Skorpion, tretende Nahasch. [...] Siebenmal wird im Johannis Evangelium der Mond den Zodiakus umkreisen. Sieben Sternbilder wird die Sonne durchwandern. Und am Ende dieses überaus künstlich und konsequent gebauten astralen Gesichtes wird am See Genesareth das rituelle Mahl der Sieben während der Frühlingsgleiche stattfinden, wie ich in meinem „Alderevangelium“ nachgewiesen. [...] Also ist der Aufgang des Erforschens der *Fußtapfen des Herrn bei Johannes*“ *Astrale Geheimnisse des Christentums* (Frankfurt am Main: Neuer Frankfurter Verlag GmbH, 1913): 131-132.

<sup>530</sup> E.g. von Harbou, *Metropolis* 9-11.

tropical zodiac.<sup>531</sup> Faithful to this theme in her screenplay, von Harbou used the zodiac to guide, as it were, the experiences of the characters. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the only scene in the entire film to feature stars—the heroine Maria’s prophetic account of the Tower of Babel—accurately forecasts future events by a retelling of the past. As discussed in the first chapter, many *fin-de-siècle* scholars concluded that astrology and Gnosticism were virtually inextricable, and, as this chapter demonstrates, the Pan-Babylonians who contributed to the revival of Gnosticism proved particularly vocal regarding modern Europeans’ acknowledgment of the alleged shamanistic origins of Christianity. Unsurprisingly, the leaders of Europe’s esoteric schools, including Franz Hartmann, Max Heindel, Rudolf Steiner, and Johanna van der Meulen, were quick to embrace their research in order to support the astrological themes already established in their societies. This chapter represents only a kernel of the erudite knowledge of astrology teeming throughout Europe during the Imperial and Weimar eras; only further research can elucidate and clarify the complex heuristics.

Not only did these scholars and mystics agree regarding the nature and ubiquity of astrology in the origins of Christianity, an analysis of *Metropolis* based on their treatises reveals that Fritz Lang and Thea von Harbou exhibited a profound knowledge regarding the astral-Gnostic mythologies propagated among their contemporaries and, by adopting their methodological applications of occult aesthetics, incorporated these concepts into their filmic narrative. *Metropolis* was not their first film to include such symbolism. As discussed in previous chapters, Lang and von Harbou were known for implementing themes and motifs of the occult, supernatural, and even Gnostic symbolism in their films.

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<sup>531</sup>In astrology, the *tropical zodiac* uses the twelve constellation clusters, beginning at the spring equinox regardless the positions of the fixed stars. It is distinguished from the *sidereal zodiac*, which is based on all star clusters.

## THE GOSPEL IN THE SKY

In September 1920, the same month that Hans Werckmeister's *Algol* premiered at Berlin, Arthur Drews was at work in his university office at Karlsruhe completing his latest historical treatise. Entitled *The Gospel of Mark as a Testimony against the Historicity of Jesus* (Das Markusevangelium als Zeugnis Gegen die Geschichtlichkeit Jesu, 1921), he hoped its contents would spark controversy on the cultural scene. He smugly noted—

The duration of the World War interrupted the debate over the Jesus question. Whether this debate has left a deep impression on the most ardent advocates of a “history” of the Gospels, I am not in the position to say. Just as those universities with theological inclinations have held (and continue to hold) the Christ Myth in high regard, perhaps those many lectures in favor of the historicity of Jesus have been able to put forth more striking reasons than those still being advanced in numerous brochures, journal articles, etc. But, rumor has it, I should have reason to doubt this.<sup>532</sup>

In all its verbosity, Drews's publication backed a bold claim he had asserted during the original Christ Myth debate in 1909, viz. that Mark's Gospel “originally referred to the annual journey of the sun through the twelve signs of the zodiac.”<sup>533</sup> Filled with elaborate diagrams and astrological hermeneutics, his new book outlined the entire Gospel in terms of classical astrology, asserting that what moderns had come to associate with desiccated history was actually a sophisticated document filled with metaphors, nuanced references, and wordplay pertaining to Gnostic teaching and practice. Why Drews did not promulgate this argument along with his earlier, more extensive treatises on esoteric Christianity is uncertain, but during the previous decade numerous seasoned

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<sup>532</sup> Original: „Der Weltkrieg hat in seiner Zeit die Auseinandersetzung über die Jesusfrage jäh unterbrochen. Ob diese Auseinandersetzung auf die amtsförmlichen Verfechter der evangelischen ‚Geschichte‘ einen tieferen Eindruck hervorgebracht hat, dies beurteilen bin ich nicht in der Lage. Möglich, daß in den vielen Vorlesungen über die Geschichtlichkeit Jesu, wie sie im Hinblick auf die Christusmythe inzwischen von theologischer Seite auf den Universitäten gehalten worden sind und noch immer gehalten werden, schlagendere Gründe für die Geschichtlichkeit vorgebracht sind als in den zahlreichen Broschüren, Zeitschriftenaufsätzen usw., obschon ich nach dem, was mir hierüber zu Ohren gekommen ist, Grund habe, dieses zu bezweifeln.“ Arthur Drews, *Das Markusevangelium als Zeugnis Gegen die Geschichtlichkeit Jesu* (Jena: Eugen Dietrichs Verlag, 1921): 2-3.

<sup>533</sup> Drews, C. Delisle Burns, trans. *The Christ Myth* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1910): 139.

and aspiring scholars including Eduard von Stucken, Franz Boll, Wilhelm Erbt, and Andrzej Niemojewski produced an impressive bibliography heavily influencing his conclusions. Contemporaneous to these scholars, influential mystics including Franz Hartmann, Max Heindel, and Rudolf Steiner drew from, and in some cases inspired, the Pan-Babylonians in their agenda to uncover astral-Gnostic myths in early Christian texts and traditions.

### *Solar Wisdom of Biblical Myth*

By 1926, when his zodiacal exegeses of the Mark failed to shake the Weimar cultural scene, the bombastic professor at Karlsruhe railed that his argument, by no means new to twentieth-century scholarship, had only become suppressed by a mainstream culture in denial about the nonexistence of the progenitor of modern morality and social order.<sup>534</sup>

As early as 1909, Drews had acclaimed:

The Synoptic Gospels leave open the question whether they treat of a man made God or of a God made man. The foregoing account has shown that the Jesus of the Gospels is to be understood only as a God made man. The story of his life, as presented in the Gospels, is the rendering into history of a primitive religious myth. Most of the great heroes of the legend, which passes as historical, are similar incarnate Gods – such as Jason, Hercules, Achilles, Theseus, Perseus, Siegfried, etc.; in these we have nothing but the old Aryan sun – champion in the struggle against the powers of darkness and of death. That primitive Gods in the

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<sup>534</sup> Drews would state this point again in his *Die Leugnung der Geschichtlichkeit Jesu in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Karlsruhe: G. Braun, 1926): „Die ganze Überlieferung, worauf jene Kirche sich stützt, erweist sich alsdann als das ungeheuerliche Werk priesterlicher Herrschaftsucht, während der Protestantismus sich auf ein Buch gründen würde, das nichts als Märchen, Sagen, morgenländische Mythen enthält und von dem Glauben an solche das Seelenheil abhängig machen würde. [...] Nachdem sie anfangs bestritten, daß an ihr vernünftigerweise überhaupt gezweifelt werden könne, und mit dem Pathos der Entrüstung und angeblich ‚wissenschaftlichem‘ Rüstzeug auf den Angriff ihrer Gegner antworteten, haben sie neuerdings die Taktik eingeschlagen, unter Berufung darauf, daß jener Angriff ‚mit den Mitteln der Wissenschaft abgeschlagen‘ und die Frage damit für sie ‚erledigt‘ sei, das ganze Problem möglichst als nicht vorhanden anzusehen, und versucht, es auf diese Weise durch Totschweigen aus der Welt zu schaffen. Warum sich auch darüber aufregen, da sich herausgestellt hat, daß ihre anfängliche Befürchtung, ihren Anhang einzubüßen, sich als grundlos erwiesen hat und die Menge sich durch die Leugnung der Geschichtlichkeit Jesu kaum irgendwie in ihrem religiösen Verhalten hat beirren lassen? Je weniger über die ganze Frage gesprochen wird, desto eher darf man hoffen, sie in Vergessenheit zu bringen. Und da die bürgerliche Presse und die unpolitischen Zeitschriften so wie so auf Seiten der Kirche stehen und sich ihre bezüglichen Kritiken von Theologen schreiben lassen, weil bei dem allgemeinen Mangel religionsgeschichtlicher Kenntnisse nur diese von der Sache etwas zu verstehen scheinen, so glaubt man sich hierdurch ein für alle Mal gegen weitere Angriffe von außen gesichert“ (126, 127).

view of a later age should become men, without, however, ceasing to be clothed with the glamour of the deity, is to such an extent the ordinary process, that the reverse, the elevation of men to Gods, is as a rule only found in the earliest stages of human civilization, or in periods of moral and social decay, when fawning servility and worthless flattery fashion a prominent man, either during his life or after his death, into a divine being.<sup>535</sup>

In his agenda to abolish Christianity and to revive Gnosticism in the modern age, Drews avoided explicitly condoning a similar revival of astrology. But, as he and his colleagues continually asserted, the two practices were essentially intertwined. By the end of the Great War, a growing number of Pan-Babylonians indicated how astrological lore stood at the center of understanding the Gnosticism encoded in the earliest remnants of original Christian teaching, tradition, and practice. Until recent trends in scholarship, they claimed, institutionalized Christianity had grossly distorted the genuine interpretation of the religion's true history and message.

The seemingly unsophisticated style of the Gospels did not deter the Pan-Babylonians from augmenting the notion from previous centuries that, far from rudimentary biographies of Christ and his followers, their stories proffered profound esoteric significances that had become often half-embraced, ignored, or altogether rejected by normative Christianity. The major theological squabbles during the Ante-Nicene Period, they noted, would seem petty and curious to moderns who did not understand the ancient conceptions of astrology or Gnosticism. One of the most peculiar of these controversies concerned the duration of Jesus's ministry. For about eighteen centuries, the Christendom held that the timespan between Jesus's baptism and his resurrection comprised three years. But while the Gospel of John mentioned three Passovers, the standard Synoptic Gospels featured only one year of Jesus's ministry. Above all, these

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<sup>535</sup> Drews, *The Christ Myth* 265.

scholars noted that the second-century theologian Irenaeus, orthodoxy's first systematic apologeticist, went to great efforts to prove that Jesus exercised his ministry over several years.<sup>536</sup> Irenaeus's greatest opponent in this matter included various Gnostic sects, especially the followers of Valentinus, who stated that, on the contrary, Jesus suffered and died on the twelfth month of His ministry.<sup>537</sup>

The Gnostics' reason for commemorating the life of Jesus within the solar year was not arbitrary. Whether they upheld or denied the historicity of Jesus, the Pan-Babylonians reiterated these ancient sects' argument that the Gospels, especially Mark, contained highly erudite astrological doctrines common to shamanistic mystery religious traditions whose culmination peaked during the time of Christ. Steeped in the astrological lore of Greco-Roman, Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, and Mesoamerican civilizations, these philologists and historians set to work connecting Gnostic Christianity to its perceived spiritual progenitors, even speculating on an international language of the stars among ancient civilizations.<sup>538</sup> Due in part to their exclusivity and in some cases flagrant disregard for conventional scholarship, most of the Pan-Babylonians heavily cited and conferred with one another regarding their investigations. Though their general approach to the Gnostic origins to Christianity generally centered on the reevaluation of

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<sup>536</sup> Drews, *The Christ Myth* 215-216.

<sup>537</sup> Wilhelm Erbt's *Das Markusevangelium : eine Untersuchung über die Form der Petruserinnerungen und die Geschichte der Urgemeinde* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1911) and *Jesus: die Entstehung des Christentums* (Leipzig: Eduard Pfeiffer Verlag, 1914): 3; Andrzej Niemojewski, *Gott Jesus: im Lichte fremder und eigener Forschungen samt Darstellung der evangelischen Astralstoffe, Astralszenen und Astralsysteme III* (München: A. & R. Huber's Verlag, 1910): 527, n93. Though Erbt explicated his argument in *Jesus* in 1914, he had already laid out his argument in *Das Markusevangelium*. In the former he explained how the author of Mark's Gospel structured Jesus' life according to the solar scheme starting at December 22, when the sun turns again on its upward course in the sky. Centered on Jesus' role as the renewer, the Gospel falls into twenty-eight sections, each representing a particular month in the twelve months of the year and thus reconciling Jesus' ministry as two years, four months long. Erbt then proceeded to examine how each of these sections picture Jesus in accordance with the Babylonian calendar, a narrative arrangement for which, purportedly, Peter was accountable. When James became of the head of the burgeoning Church, Christians reverted from the Babylonian astral doctrine to a pronouncedly Jewish worldview. In his *Das Markusevangelium*, Drews drew further on Erbt's assertions by demonstrating that lunar as well as solar myths might be read alongside one another in Mark.

<sup>538</sup> For the universality of astrological knowledge, see esp. comments in Niemojewski, *Astral Geheimnisse* 108.

standard Christian codices, the scholars whose methodology sought to deconstruct the New Testament scriptures with solely Gnostic critiques appear to have been Boll, Drews, Erbt, and Niemojewski.<sup>539</sup> Ultimately, these three scholars produced an impressive amount of rigorous, passionately worded historical criticism well into Weimar Germany under conviction of professional expression of curiosity on the one hand and admitted speculations on conclusions based on intuition and finesse.

Though all four Boll, Drews, Erbt, and Niemojewski offered detailed investigations of Christian texts, only Drews and Erbt offered extensive, comprehensive astral-mythical analyses of Mark. Essentially, they argued that Mark's Gospel stood as a poetic retelling of the astral mythical journey of the sun god polished in Tanakh iconography and allegorically written into the sociocultural context of first-century Palestine. Accordingly, the order of the segments follows almost strictly the astral mythical cycle beginning on the tropical zodiac at the 'birth' of the new sun at the winter solstice during the sign of Aquarius and ending at its 'death' twelve months later during the sign of Capricorn (see Diagram 5.1).

Within the layout of the solar calendar, Drews and Erbt showed that the Gospel could be analyzed not only according to the astral myths behind the "houses," or major constellations of each sign, but also according to each sign's "decans," or the three smaller constellations in each house. Since Mark's Gospel could be elucidated in terms of the solar year, they also demonstrated how the entire liturgical years for the first-century Jewish as well as normative Christian tradition could now be explicated in the

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<sup>539</sup> A significant work not discussed at length in the current study is Franz Boll, *Aus der Offenbarung Johannes: Hellenistische Studien zum Weltbild der Apokalypse* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1914). Unlike other works by Drews, Erbt, and Niemojewski, Boll's book on the Apocalypse posits that only excerpts of the Revelation pertain to astral-mythical symbolism while others specifically pertain to esoteric rites purportedly not related to astrology.

true, astral-Gnostic significance they contained. Even certain mythogramic motifs like the twelve disciples could be explained in term of the twelve signs of the zodiac.<sup>540</sup> Although Erbt and Drews cited numerous scholars who had written regarding this premise, their works—published in 1911 and 1920, respectively—were comprehensive studies synthesizing previous works on the topic and presenting verse-by-verse investigations of the Gospel of Mark.

The Pan-Babylonians certainly had an effect on society in spite of the lost cause which Drews increasingly—and correctly—viewed into the 1920s in their struggle for the intellectual overthrow of liberal theology and, ultimately, exoteric Christianity. Not only do the works of Steiner, Kellner, Reuss, and Hartmann show that leaders of esoteric schools were familiar with recent scholarly research during the Gnostic revival, it also demonstrates how widely circulating topics—such as the discovery of the Turfan texts, recent translations of Hindu and Buddhist texts, or Drews's preoccupation about the ahistoricity of Jesus—were trickling into the conscious of German-speaking Europeans.

Even before the culmination of the astral-myth theories during the Great War, in their lectures and pamphlets these mystics proved highly acquainted with the complex astrological systems said to underlay the scriptures of Christianity. As early as his seminal *Magic: Black and White* in 1893, long before the Pan-Babylonian upheaval of orientalism, Franz Hartmann clarified thorough arguments against a purely historical understanding of religion:

If our natural philosophers would study the Bible in its esoteric and spiritual aspects, they might learn a great many things which they desire to know. They

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<sup>540</sup> These studies include Drews, Arthur. *Das Markusevangelium als Zeugnis Gegen die Geschichtlichkeit Jesu* (Jena: Eugen Dietrichs Verlag, 1921); Wilhelm Erbt, *Das Markusevangelium : eine Untersuchung über die Form der Petruserinnerungen und die Geschichte der Urgemeinde* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1911).

might learn to find out what are the true powers of the ‘living faith,’ and which are required to produce occult phenomena at will; they might find instruction how to transmute lead or iron into pure gold, and to transform animals into gods. But it is a truth, based upon natural laws, that man can see nothing except that which exists in his mind. If his mind is filled with illusions, he will see nothing but illusions, and the deepest of symbols will be pictures without meaning to him.<sup>541</sup>

The arcane, the esoteric, and the occult were far more personal than any ideological construct of nineteenth-century liberal Protestant theology or even the Catholic mysticism to which the doctor had been attracted in his youth.<sup>542</sup> It would not be until the Gnostic revival that mystics like Hartmann, intrigued by the evidence emerging from the Orient, would embrace his shared methodology with the Pan-Babylonians.

Similarly and for the same reasons, Heindel reveled in dissecting from ancient myths occult doctrine, especially the Christian preserved in their societies and reemerging from the Holy Lands. In a discussion on Christian apocalypticism, Heindel, wrote:

All Race-spirits know this, and realize that their religions are merely steps to something better. This is shown by the fact that all Race-religions, without exception, point to One Who is *to come*. The religion of the Persians pointed to Mithras; of the Chaldeans to Tammuz. The old Norse Gods foresaw the approach of “The Twilight of the Gods,” when Sutr, the bright Sun-spirit, shall supersede them and a new and fairer order be established on “Gimle,” the regenerated earth. The Egyptians waited for Horus, the newborn Sun. Mithras and Tammuz are also symbolized as Solar orbs and all the principal Temples were built facing the East, that the rays of the rising Sun might shine directly through the open doors; even Saint Peter’s at Rome is so placed. All these facts show that it was generally known that the One Who was to come was a Sun-spirit and was to save humanity from the separative influences necessarily contained in all Race-religions.<sup>543</sup>

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<sup>541</sup> Hartmann, *Magic: White and Black* 28-29.

<sup>542</sup> Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore, MA: John Hopkins University Press, 2004): 94.

<sup>543</sup> Heindel, *Cosmo-Conception* 383. In his works, Heindel wrote at length about the “Temples of Mystery,” which, according to Rosierucian doctrine, formed the basis of ancient esoteric Christianity. At its core was astrology: “In the Temples of Mystery the Hierophant taught his pupils that there is in the Sun a spiritual, as well as a physical force. The latter force in the rays of the Sun is the fecundating principle in nature. It causes the growth of the plant world and thereby sustains the animal and human kingdom. It is the upbuilding energy which is the source of all physical force. /This physical, solar energy reaches its highest expression in midsummer, when the days are longest and the nights are shortest, because the rays of the Sun then fall directly on the northern hemisphere. At that time the spiritual forces are the most inactive. /On the other hand, in December, during the long winter nights, the physical force of the solar orb is dormant and the spiritual forces reach their maximum degree of activity./ The night between the 24th and the 25th of

In terms of Christian scripture, Rosicrucianism had long embraced various astral-mythical motifs in its initiations and practices. Heindel himself taught various courses on “simplified scientific astrology” in the context of esoteric Christian doctrine and its significance for the future evolution of the human race, arguing, like Hartmann, on the essentiality of myth in the occult experience.<sup>544</sup>

### *Esoteric Astrology*

Surveying frescos in early Christian catacombs, Niemojewski noted that many apocryphal, even heretical, images appeared in early Gnostic Christian art, including secret initiation rites and priestesses. In addition, he noted that, for one familiar with contemporaneous artwork portraying astrological narratives, many of the identical figures could be found in the ruins of public Roman temples as in hidden Gnostic catacombs.

Above all, since the Christian religion transpired in a pagan empire drenched in astrological knowledge, Niemojewski claimed that his colleagues had not taken into account a vital influence of the time—one so banal in the Greco-Roman cultural experience that would leave few written records of its authority: “esoteric astrology.”

For these reasons, he cautioned his readers not to decipher early religious artwork they found in museums with presentist perspectives based on their own experience of Christianity. Insinuating that the catacomb artists were astronomers adept in the patterns

December is The Holy Night, *par excellence*, of the entire year. The Zodiacial sign of the immaculate celestial Virgin stands upon the eastern horizon near midnight, the Sun of the New Year is then born and starts upon his journey from the southernmost point toward the northern hemisphere, to save that part of humanity (physically) from the darkness and famine which would inevitably result if he were to remain permanently south of the equator. /To the people of the northern hemisphere, where all our present day religions originated, the Sun is directly below the Earth; and the spiritual influences are strongest, in the north, at midnight of the 24th of December. /That being the case, it follows as a matter of course that it would then be easiest for those who wished to take a definite step toward Initiation to get in conscious touch with the spiritual Sun especially for the first time” (*Cosmo-Conception* 390). Heindel’s understanding of the solstices here is compatible with occult doctrine in general. Steiner himself discussed similar esoteric Christian; see e.g. his “Lecture IX: The Apocalypse of St. John,” *Christianity as Mystical Fact* 177-197.

<sup>544</sup> See Heindel’s overview of Rosicrucian-based astrology for initiates in *Cosmo-Conception* 533-534.

of the night sky, Niemojewski asserted that early frescos served as hermeneutic tools to impart incomunicable Gnostic teachings, to induce meditative visions, and to inspire personal revelation. Far from a religious interpretation accessible to all (*gemeinverständlich*), he asserted that various hagiographic gestures in ancient frescos, though still emulated in the Catholic Mass, had degenerated from specific astral secrets maintained in the sacramental rites of the ancient mystery religion.

Disgruntled by esteemed professionals like the German Christian archaeologist Josef Wilpert, whose work he disparaged as propagandistic, in 1914 Niemojewski asserted that mere surface impressions were not sufficient for a complete appreciation of ancient religious art. Instead, Niemojewski indicated, one must take into account the psychological experience behind religious artwork. Recalling Albert Schweitzer's own conclusions about the historical Jesus, Niemojewski bemoaned the bitter reality that normative Christianity now consisted of almost two millennia of revisionist layers, including the Church Fathers and the Bible, which occluded anything conclusive about the esoteric astrology at the heart of its practices. He wrote:

Although we live in the age of photography, in which solemn assemblies at the end of recorded in photographic memory. Nevertheless, in no church have I found images that show us how a modern priest reads the Mass, hears confession, weds young people, etc. Holy legends and miracles, yes, are represented in masses figuratively for teaching, but the everyday, the *normal* excluded. So it is now. So it always was.<sup>545</sup>

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<sup>545</sup> Original: „Wir leben zwar im Zeitalter der Photographie, im welchem feierliche Versammlungen am Schluß zum Andenken photographisch aufgekommen werden. Trotzdem fand ich in keiner Kirche Bilder, die uns zeigen, wie ein moderner Priester die Messe liest, Beichte hört, junge Leute traut usw. Heilige Legenden, Wunder, ja, die werden in Massen bildlich zur Belehrung dargestellt, das Alltägliche aber, das Normale ist ausgeschlossen. So ist jetzt. So war es immer./ Oder aber sollen wir denken, daß die frommen Urchristen, die schwere Lage des Papsttums um 16. Jahrhunderts voraussehend, als die ‚Protestanten sich bemüht, den Zusammenhang der Katholiken jener Zeit mit den Christen der ersten Jahrhunderte zu zerreißen, indem sie laut in die Welt hinausriefen, daß Rom und seine Priester den echten christlichen Glauben gefälscht und entstellt hätten, auf den Wänden der Katakomben ihre Sitten zu verewigten suchten, sie, die von der Kirche bis zum 31. Mai 1578 gänzlich Vergessenen und im rechten Augenblick als ein ausgezeichnetes Kampfmittel Wiedergefundene? Das ist meine Kritik der Wilpertschen Deutung. Die Wissenschaft kann diese Deutung nicht annehmen.“ Niemojewski, *Astral Geheimnisse* 22-23.

As a continent bathed for centuries in blood over religious dissent, he asserted, moderns should know how to strip back the “veil of false, deceptive exegesis” endorsed by the status quo.

The Polish scholar went on to assert that the emergent fifth-century orthodoxy at the Council of Nicaea had displaced true Christianity no less than later Protestantism, which, with all its nostalgic yearnings to return to the origins of Christianity, had inadvertently severed itself from the mystical tradition underlying authentic Christian, i.e. Gnostic, experience which Christ taught to his disciples and which remained best preserved only among ascetics like the Valentinians and Ophites. The embrace of egalitarian religiosity, he concluded, had led to exotericization on the one hand and sociopolitical oppression on the other. Even an analysis of the Lord’s Passion narrative—including the anointing at Bethany, the theme of following a man with the water vase, the betrayal by Judas, and Jesus’s agony in the Gethsemane—may be better understood through an exegesis of the Gospels and classical pagan works including in Homer’s *Odyssey* rather than subsequent medieval hermeneutics.<sup>546</sup>

The Pan-Babylonians even ensured that medieval Christian iconography attested to their claims. Indeed, no myth seemed safe from analysis. In addition to investigating numerous early medieval churches, hagiographic relics, and religious paintings pertaining to astrological myths, Niemojewski observed that the early Gnostics maintained two astrological accounts of Jesus’s birth fraught with astrological symbolism—the solar-centered account without the manger including the Virgin Mary and Joseph the Carpenter on the one hand; and the lunar version in Luke, whose story about the manger was

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<sup>546</sup> See the section entitled, „Die Verspotterung Jesu im Lichte der astralen Mythologie,“ in Niemojewski, *Astral Geheimnisse* 44-78.

supplemented with extra-biblical traditions about the ox's stable. However, even these myths had become distorted through the centuries, largely by uninformed artists.

Referring to an early fifteenth-century image on display at the South Kensington Museum at London, Niemojewski asserted regarding lunar symbolism:

To those who want to hold a different opinion, I would like to ask why animals and not the parents stand around the Child? The Gospel of Luke mentions no animals! [...] Since, as noted, the zodiacal constellations were known as houses, the bull must have its house [i.e. Taurus] and the donkey (in Cancer) would likewise have its own house. Thus, if the artist brought them in a house with the child in the manger, he no longer understood the astral myth very well and wanted to bring it into harmony with astronomy.<sup>547</sup>

In this and other myths, such astral symbolism had been perfectly preserved in Church tradition, Niemojewski observed that even though Church Fathers like Irenaeus and, later, the Catholic Church had condemned deifying Jesus as a sun god that they still elected to celebrate his birthday on the *Dies Natalis Solis Invicti*, i.e. “the birthday of the invincible sun.” Niemojewski was not alone. Erbt and Drews frequently indicated that, for example, the births of Jesus and John the Baptist, celebrated by the Church immediately after the winter and summer solstices, respectively, signified not merely the Christianization of the “light” and “dark” twin sun gods popular in nearly all ancient cultures. Instead, in composing their scriptures the Gnostic-Christians designated such days in full solemn awareness of their astral significance.<sup>548</sup> Christendom, they asserted, had only fallen into the delusion of pure historicity sometime after the Protestant Reformation.

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<sup>547</sup> Original: „Wer eine andere Meinung vertreten wollte, den möchte ich fragen, warum bei dem Kinde die Tiere und nicht die Eltern sind? Das Evangelium von Lukas erwähnt doch keine Tiere! [...] Da, wie bemerkt, Zodiakalsternbilder Häuser hießen, müßte der Stier sein Haus und der Esel im Krebs ebenfalls sein Haus haben. Wenn der Künstler sie also in ein Haus brachte mit dem Kinde in der Krippe, so verstand er nicht mehr gut den Astralmythus und wollte ihn mit der Astronomie in Einklang bringen.“ Niemojewski, *Astral Geheimnisse* 124-125.

<sup>548</sup> See esp. „Kapital 18: Himmelswillinge,“ in Niemojewski, *Gott Jesus II* 307-320.

But such ‘denial’ was not as detrimental to contemporary scientific investigation as Drews, Niemojewski, and their colleagues wanted to believe. As discussed in Chapter One, novice scholars like Wolfgang Schultz and Wilhelm Erbt struggled to define their scientific assessments of Kabbalah and Gnosticism *in contrast to* modern occult practices purporting to extend back to true esoteric Christianity and further into Iran and Persia. Even the celebrated Belgian historian of religion Franz Cumont, who was not a Pan-Babylonian and for whom astrology was “nothing but the most monstrous of all the chimeras begotten of superstition,” admitted in 1912 that

at the end of the nineteenth century the development of history, from various sides, recalled the attention of investigators to ancient astrology. It is an exact science which was superimposed on primitive beliefs, and when classical philology, enlarging its horizon, brought fully within its range of observation the development of the sciences in antiquity, it could not set aside a branch of knowledge, illegitimate, I allow, but indissolubly linked not only with astronomy and meteorology, but also with medicine, botany, ethnography, and physics. If we go back to the earliest stages of every kind of learning, as far as the Alexandrine and even the Babylonian period, we shall find almost everywhere the disturbing influence of these astral “mathematics.”<sup>549</sup>

Under the sway of reason the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries condemned this heresy in the name of scientific orthodoxy. Surveying the centrality of astral-Gnostic doctrine in early Christianity, Franz Boll stated that the queen of the sciences influenced the medieval alchemists in dividing the human body into twelve separate sections based on

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<sup>549</sup> Cumont continued, suggesting astrology’s esoteric influence over modern religion: “This pseudo-science is in reality a creed. Beneath the icy crust of a cold and rigid dogma run the troubled waters of a jumble of worships, derived from an immense antiquity; and as soon as enquiry was directed to the religions of the past, it was attracted to this doctrinal superstition, perhaps the most astonishing that has ever existed. Research ascertained how, after having reigned supreme in Babylonia, it subdued the cults of Syria and of Egypt, and under the Empire—to mention only the West—transformed even the ancient paganism of Greece and Rome. [...] I shall not dwell on the interest afforded to the scholar by a series of texts spread over more than fifteen centuries, from the Alexandrine period to the Renaissance. Nor, again, will I attempt to estimate the importance which might be claimed in the political sphere by a doctrine which has often guided the will of kings, and decided their enterprises. Nor can I prove here by examples how the propagation of astrological doctrines reveals unsuspected relations between the oldest civilizations, and leads him who traces it from Alexandria and from Babylon as far as India, China, and Japan, bringing him back again from the Far East to the Far West.” Franz Cumont, *Astrology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans* (New York, NY: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912): xi, xii; xv.

the signs of the zodiac. This and similar paradigms in Western thinking did not arise from nothing, he wrote, noting “one sees that the Gnostics were already preparing the groundwork for anatomy.”<sup>550</sup>

Kindling the modern revival of Gnosticism up to the wartime era, this increasingly loud chorus of scholars convinced *fin-de-siècle* Europeans to question the extent orthodox Christianity and its secular posterity had distorted the cultural products of their own past. Certain Pan-Babylonians welcomed popular interpretations of astrology and other occult practices. In addition to his growing fascination with X-rays and the ‘modern’ occult sciences which he felt would reintegrate supernatural anatomical forces into scientific discourse, Niemojewski approved with glee the revival of ‘old’ occult sciences like astrology:

But still today astrology does not belong to the dead. At the moment when I started to write this chapter, I received by mail a brochure from the Russian journal *Isis*, which, printed four times annually, is “dedicated to the theoretical and practical study of the occult sciences” [...]. In various German and French newspapers listings can be found in which the astrologers promise people read their future in the stars. In England, an Astrological Society, whose members explore the influence of the stars on human life exists. A club of German astrologers exists under the name *Kosmos* in Germany. Nor is there a lack in Russia and Poland.<sup>551</sup>

Indeed, popular reassessments of Christian astral-mythology had already become a

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<sup>550</sup> Original: „Man sieht, daß der Gnostiker die Grundlagen für seine Anatomie schon bereitet fand. Andererseits hatte er für seine Άληθεια [i.e., Wahrheit] nun bloß mehr die Reiche der Buchstaben nach biblischem Vorbild anders zu gruppieren als die Astrologen: aber die Haupteile war ihm auch hier von ihnen gegeben. Das tertium comparationis war ursprünglich die Reiche 12 Tierkreisbilder gewesen; es schied bei dem Gnostiker aus, sodaß seinem System entsprechend die menschliche Gestalt unmittelbar zu den weltbauenden Buchstaben in Beziehung kam und nach ihren Teilen mit dem Alphabet verglichen wurde.“ Franz Boll, *Sphaera: Neue Griechische Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Sternbilder; mit einem Beitrag von Karl Dyroff, sechs Tafeln und neunzehn Textabbildungen* (Leipzig: Druck und Verlag von B.G. Teubner, 1903): 471; 472.

<sup>551</sup> Original: „Im Augenblick, als ich dieses Kapital zu schreiben begonnen, erhielt ich durch die Post einen Prospekt der russischen Zeitschrift ‚Isis‘, welche schon das vierte Jahr ‚dem theoretischen und besonders praktischen Studium der Geheimwissenschaften gewidmet ist, [...] /In verschiedenen deutschen und französischen Zeitungen sind Inserate zu finden, in welchen Astrologen den Menschen ihre Zukunft aus den Sternen abzulesen versprechen. In England existiert eine Astrologische Gesellschaft, deren Mitglieder den Einfluß der Sterne auf das Menschenleben erforschen. Unter dem Namen ‚Kosmos‘ existiert in Deutschland ein Verein deutscher Astrologen. Diese fehlen auch nicht in Rußland und Polen.“ Niemojewski, *Astral Geheimnisse* 139.

popular phenomenon during the late nineteenth century before the Pan-Babylonian revival of Gnosticism. Some interpretations of astrology were closer to standard religious orthodoxy. In Britain in 1893, the minister Ethelbert W. Bullinger composed *The Witness of the Stars*, which, claiming that the entirety of the Gospels laid in astrological mythologies, enjoyed four editions by 1920. Meanwhile in the United States, minister Joseph Seiss published *The Gospel in the Stars: or Primeval Astronomy*, which by 1910 had undergone five editions.<sup>552</sup>

More often, obviously, these treatises were inclined to theosophical and downright Gnostic worldviews. In Britain beginning in the 1910s, for example, Alice Bailey promulgated her seminal *Esoteric Astrology*, part of which she channeled telepathically through “the Tibetan,” as he was called, later identified as Djwal Khul. In 1911, Isabella Pagan published the first edition of her *From Pioneer to Poet: the Twelve Great Gates*, which outlined the zodiac as a guide for personal transformation.<sup>553</sup> All writers would enjoy immense popularity into the era after the Great War.

Into the 1920s, astral-Gnostic teachings flourished in German-speaking esoteric schools like Theosophy, Anthroposophy, the Pansophic Lodge, and, later, Fraternitas Saturni. Further research must be conducted in order to take into full account the effect of astral-Gnostic mythologies, but figures such as Rudolf Steiner gave whole lecture series on astral-mythologies and their significance in the ceremonies and practices of ancient priesthoods. Not unlike the Pan-Babylonians, Steiner wrote at length regarding

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<sup>552</sup> Ethelbert W. Bullinger, *The Witness of the Stars*, Fourth Edition (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode [Bible Warehouse], Ltd., 1893/1921); Joseph A. Seiss, *The Gospel in the Stars: or, Primeval Astronomy*, Fifth Edition. (New York City, NY: Charles E. Cook, 1884/1910).

<sup>553</sup> Alice Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology* (New York: Lucis Publishing Co., 1971); Isabella Pagan, *From Pioneer to Poet: or, The Twelve Great Gates; an Expansion of the Signs of the Zodiac Analyzed*. Fifth Edition. (Theosophical Publishing House, 1911/1969).

the first initiation ceremonies among the first Christians, information which he claimed to have received through clairvoyance and occult investigation:

We must find again the Jesus Christmas Mystery, and we must find it by cultivating all that within ourselves of which we have spoken today. We must find the Christmas light within ourselves as the shepherds did the Angel's light in the field; and as the Magi of the East, so must we find the star through the power of that which is true Spiritual Science. [...] For in a gospel that is not recognized by the Church it is related that the Jesus-child spoke to His Mother immediately after His birth in definite words. We certainly approach the Child in the crib today in the true way when we rightly hear the words which He wishes to speak to us: "Awaken the Christmas light within you, and the Christmas light will then also appear to you and to your fellow-men with you in the world outside."<sup>554</sup>

The esoteric astrology promulgated by Niemojewski was nothing new, and by the second decade of the twentieth century the resurgence of Gnostic scriptures with professed astrological significance were a welcome supplement to the general occult conception of esoteric schools. Under light of this new evidence for a Christianity that defied social hierarchy, priggish morality, and capitalism, Pan-Babylonians like Drews, Niemojewski, and Erbt proved tireless in their efforts to promulgate a nonconformist reinterpretation of Christianity in astrological terms, occasionally bleeding their own sociocultural agendas into their academic research. The popular press reflected this association between astrology and Gnosticism. Of the some forty-eight occult periodicals in print during the Weimar years, no less than ten regularly published material on astrology as a means of personal divination.<sup>555</sup>

#### ASTRAL MYTHS OF THE FUTURE

According to his personal legend, Fritz Lang first conceived *Metropolis* in summer 1924 during a trip to New York City, whose luminous skyscrapers towered “in order to dazzle,

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<sup>554</sup> Steiner, anonymous, trans. *The Search for the New Isis: Divine Sophia; Dornach, Dec. 23-26, 1920*. Third Edition (Spring Valley, NY: Mercury Press, 1983/1994): 48-49.

<sup>555</sup> See Treitel, *Science for the Soul*, Appendix B, 264-266.

distract, and hypnotize.”<sup>556</sup> In reality, von Harbou had by her husband’s departure been working on her script for almost three months.<sup>557</sup> Still, Lang’s mythic account signifies his directorial intrigue in his wife’s science-fiction masterpiece. In a promotional essay for the film, the director summed up his expertise in a similarly characteristic parable:

I once knew a young violinist who became a great artist. He was unable to sing or whistle the simplest tune, and could only express his musical thoughts through the medium of his instrument. And so it is with me. Everything I have to tell, I cannot express in words, but in depicting black and white on the celluloid of film; if I cannot succeed in finding expression on the picture, I certainly cannot find it in speech.<sup>558</sup>

This critical self-assessment was underscored by the wide publicity given *Metropolis* in Germany during its production that lasted from 21 May 1925 to 30 October 1926, when newspapers featured near weekly updates on the shooting progress and cited record-breaking statistics in casting and budget for “a film of titanic dimensions,” “the greatest film ever made.”<sup>559</sup> Advertised statistics compiled by the assistant producer Rudi Georg suggested that the hit-to-be was an unparalleled spectacle: 1,960,000 feet of negative film, 3,900,000 feet of positive film; 5,233 performers; 50 specially designed cars.<sup>560</sup> In addition, these figures reveal that Lang’s imaginative visions could not outrun his financial budget, provided entirely by UFA Studios in Neubabelsberg. Backed by skilled technicians and the most powerful studio in the Weimar Republic, Lang guaranteed staggering visuals and special effects in a technologically tinged melodrama, a unique synthesis of sheer imagination and mechanical ingenuity. But what he did not

<sup>556</sup> Kreimeier, *The Ufa Story* 153.

<sup>557</sup> Elsaesser, *Metropolis* 9-10.

<sup>558</sup> “‘Metropolis’ Magazine.” Likewise, four decades later, Lang would draw again upon this verbal illustration for his critical self-assessment, stating that his entire career was expressly a visual experience: “To begin with, I should say that I am a visual person. I experience with my eyes and never, or only rarely, with my ears—to my constant regret.” See Eisner, *Fritz Lang* 9.

<sup>559</sup> More than thirty-six thousand extras were used for the film, while the final expenses exceeded the budget by four times, costing 5.3 million marks. Promotional slogans and statistics from Anton Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009): 205-206.

<sup>560</sup> “‘Metropolis’ Magazine.”

advertise—but rather concealed, much like the credit due to his wife—was the occult inspiration behind his visual work on *Metropolis*.

### *From Alpha to Omega*

As author and screenwriter, Thea von Harbou implemented this astrological schema into *Metropolis* with a Gnostic significance which she had first devised for her two-part fantasy epic *Die Nibelungen* (1924). Just before writing *Metropolis*, she based her novel and screenplay for *Die Nibelungen* on the thirteenth-century Germanic poem of the same name. In her novel and screenplay von Harbou focused not on the *Götterdämmerung* but on the superhuman race that followed the gods—the “children of the mist,” or *Nibelungen*. For her, this epic was “not the song of loyalty, but a tale of deceit and betrayal, murder and revenge, blame and penance in pitiless chains.”<sup>561</sup> As sketched in Chapter Three, her interpretation of the Germanic myth parallels exactly the occult significance which Hartmann, Heindel, Steiner, and others attributed to the *Nibelungen* regarding the Atlantean Race and the mankind’s final evolutionary descent into matter after corporeal inception by the Lucifer spirits. As Diagram 5.2 shows, she based the entire plot faithfully on the pattern of the sun in its annual path through the tropical zodiac.

This two-part epic’s premise of the dilution of provincial feudalism and magical characters into the mundane world of sickness, depravity, and death stands in direct opposition to *Metropolis*, in which cosmopolitan commercialism and areligious materialism become restored with psychical harmony between head, hands, and heart. So faithful was von Harbou to mirroring her astrological schema that she incorporated it into

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<sup>561</sup> Thea von Harbou. *Metropolis*. DVD. Directed by Fritz Lang. 1927; New York, NY: Kino International Corp, 2010.

her retelling of the medievalist fantasy in *Part I: Siegfried's Death* (Siegfrieds Tod).

This parallel is only appropriate, since the mirrored premises in *Siegfried's Death* and *Metropolis* disclose the Janus-faced destiny of primitive and futuristic man.

For this reason, in *Siegfried's Death* von Harbou set forth the exact zodiacal schema that she later emulated in *Metropolis*. Although both plots are so rife with astrological symbolism and Gnostic allegory that they could only be fully elucidated in a detailed study, Diagram 5.2 offers a punctuated comparison of their narratives according to their zodiacal symbolism.<sup>562</sup> This astrological underpinning brings new light to scholars' observations that just as *Die Nibelungen* recounts the destruction of cosmic unity by man, *Metropolis* presages man's psychical redemption.<sup>563</sup> Reinforcing the occult historical worldview of esoteric schools, von Harbou symbolized primal man's fall from cosmic harmony into treachery and vice (as a result of his destruction of the magical) in *Part II: Kriemhild's Revenge* (Kriemhilds Rache), whose plotline she imbued with astral myths exclusively surrounding the summer solstice. Symbolically, the summer solstice not only marks the longest day in the year but also portends shorter days and the immanent cold of winter—an occult subtext quite appropriate for an epic about the decline and demise of a superhuman race.<sup>564</sup>

If in *Metropolis* von Harbou emulated the apocalypticism of the Gnostic mythos from Hans Brennert and Fridel Köhne's script for *Algol*, then she also took from the preceding science fiction its own zodiacal schema. To what extent Brennert and Köhne consciously

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<sup>562</sup> In the diagram, the sources for these associations, characteristics, and themes include Bullinger, Drews's *Das Markusevangelium*, Erbt's *Das Markusevangelium*, Bailey (which consists of her highly influential Theosophical lectures), Pagan, and Seiss.

<sup>563</sup> Tom Gunning. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity* (London: British Film Institute, 2000): 34-35, 53, 77; Roger Dadoun, "Metropolis: Mother-City—‘Mittler-Hitler’," trans. Arthur Goldhammer, *Camera Obscura* 15 (Fall 1986): 155.

<sup>564</sup> Niemojewski, *Gott Jesus* II 382-285.

collaborated with one another on the occult subtext of Werckmeister's film is uncertain,<sup>565</sup> but their script and its sequence of themes teem with linguistic references to astrological motifs corresponding perfectly with the tropical zodiac. In fact, their script applies more exactly to the analytical layout of the Pan-Babylonians' treatises on Mark (see Diagram 5.1). Whereas von Harbou began her scripts for both Part I of *Die Nibelungen* and *Metropolis* at Aries, the sign of the vernal equinox, Brennert and Kohne began their script at Capricorn, the sign of the winter solstice. The exact reason for von Harbou's decision to begin her screenplays with Aries rather than Capricorn seems to parallel the epistemological works of many modern occultists, who, acknowledging the zodiac had no natural beginning or end, began their zodiacal discussions with the new beginnings associated with springtime.<sup>566</sup>

By adapting the astral myths described by Pan-Babylonians, von Harbou echoed the narrative in *Algol* that industrial enterprise—analogous to the Demiurge's perverse, centralized power—expands to global proportions in order to create an internationalist world order under its own name. The machines in *Metropolis*, just as in *Algol*, are analogous to the worldly representations of the true, absolute deity, which, as emanations from the Demiurge's penchant to organize, are portrayed as an industrial “power-source” without which the workers lose their purpose.

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<sup>565</sup> While little is known about Brennert and Köhne's personal lives, they seem to have been professional partners. By the production of *Algol*, Brennert and Köhne had collaborated on the scripts of numerous films, especially with the director Carl Boese. These films include *Der Fluch des Nuri* (1918), *Die Geisha und der Samurai* (1919), *Seelenverkäufer: Das Schicksal einer Deutsch-Amerikanerin* (1919), and *Gepeitscht* (1919). Influential in early Weimar cinema, Boese was an acquaintance of Galeen and Wegener, having worked with the latter as codirector of *Der Golem*. Before *Algol*, Brennert and Köhne also collaborated as screenwriters with other directors, including Rochus Gliese in *Malaria: Urlaub vom Tode* (1919), Fritz Bernhardt in *Darwin: Die Abstammung des Menschen vom Affen* (1919), and Urban Gad in *Mein Mann, der Nachtdreikleur* (1920).

<sup>566</sup> See esp. Pagan's *From Pioneer to Poet*.

Thus, the machine-gods are vehicles at which those in *Metropolis* must be atoned in order to transcend Fredersen's tyrannical yet dubious rule. This expression of Gnostic narrative is as ingenious as it is poetic, since by its premise von Harbou projected the Pan-Babylonian myths said to link all civilizations from the ancient past into the future as the immanent machine-age capitalism that will parody this unity; moreover, as Fredersen's betoken "New Tower of Babel" suggests, the latter refuses to accept that it will always lack the immanence that the latter possesses. Thus, von Harbou used the machine-gods in her story to represent the stars—which the ancients equated with gods—whose vices the soul must pass by in order to overcome selfish base desires.

For von Harbou, this emulation of *Algol* marked a distinct spin on the Sophia-Christos fight against the Demiurge in her previous screenplays for *Das indische Grabmal*, *Der müde Tod*, and *Dr. Mabuse*. Just as in *Metropolis*, the hero and heroine in each film must pass through a complex series of artifices in order to purge themselves from the clutches of this seemingly omnipresent and anonymous figure; moreover, Fredersen echoes his predecessors by his access to the fantastic and supernatural powers implemented in machines of his city. The Maharajah Ayan earns the devotion a Yogi by whose astral projection, hypnotic powers, and telekinesis he lures the architect Herbert Rowland to his palace and later separates him entirely from his fiancée, Irene Amundsen. In *Der müde Tod*, Death (symbolizing both the Demiurge and Lucifer within himself) demonstrates to the young woman that separation from her lover was destined. The psychoanalyst Dr. Mabuse uses hypnotic powers to compel Chief Inspector von Wenk to commit suicide and Countess Dusy Told to submit to his advances. Whereas in previous films her chief plot artifices were telepathy and hypnotism, in *Metropolis* von Harbou transliterated such

supersensible powers by which her Demiurgical nemesis executes his malicious plans into magical technology. Thus, in their pact Fredersen and Rotwang seek to submit Freder and Maria into the master's power *vis-à-vis* the machine. Technology, therefore, becomes a supernatural apparatus whose amoral faculties the Demiurge must manipulate in order to expand his own burgeoning power.

Playing on these astral-Gnostic dynamics already prevalent in Europe's postwar cultural milieu, von Harbou devised in *Metropolis* a unique dynamic between man and machine encoded as an alchemical prescription to self-transcendence, a message nowhere better established than in her Gnostic epigram. If the symbolic purpose of alchemy is to transmute base metals into gold, then its purpose in *Metropolis* is to transmute neurasthenic man into technocrat—represented by its antagonist, “the inventor” Rotwang, and its protagonist, Freder, respectively. While the alchemical symbolism cannot be explicated here, its soteriological overtones are noteworthy since by alluding to transmutation von Harbou was able to transform the modernist tragedy of *Algol* into technology's final victory over premodern ignorance by portraying Freder and Maria as two redemptive halves of the anthropological Primal Man.

### *Heuristic Optics*

Since a picture is worth the proverbial thousand words, this study could comprise virtually endless postulations connecting Lang's visuals in *Metropolis* to certain ‘occult images’ published in Germany during the early twentieth century. The task seems inexhaustible and nigh impossible, since, as discussed in Chapter Two, these filmmakers were known to have drawn from Symbolist, Romantic, and other *avant-garde* painters

during their directorial careers.<sup>567</sup> Numerous scholars have gone so far as to pick out visual tricks that Lang produced almost subliminally in his *mis-en-scènes* on numerous occasions, affirming the director's penchant to meticulous order and expressionistic stylization.<sup>568</sup> For this reason, it is not improbable that Lang pulled from more contemporary sources on the occult in order to wield his actors, light patterns, and geometrical compositions into aesthetic gestalts.<sup>569</sup>

Similarly, Andrzej Niemojewski's *Astral Secrets of Christianity (Astral Geheimnisse des Christentums*, 1913) suggests that Lang may have lifted certain directorial commands and *mis-en-scène* compositions for *Metropolis* straight from similar illustrations and photographs in other publications on occult subjects. Similar to mandalas in Hinduism, these optical cryptograms served as psychical catalysts that conveyed to the viewer ineffable insight *vis-à-vis* geometric heuristics; however, so-called orthodoxy later profaned the Gnostic symbology behind Christian allegory with exoteric interpretations amenable to lay subjugation and as a result—

That which millennia ago may have appeared plain and simple to the adherents of esoteric schools or even all members of a religious sect, has become for us, at least at first glance, an utterly incomprehensible riddle. For this reason, their interpretations by such masters as Wilpert are cluttered with contradictions and are sometimes based on erroneous perceptions or modes of seeing [*irrtümliches Sehen*].<sup>570</sup>

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<sup>567</sup> Eisner, *Fritz Lang 46, The Haunted Screen* 9; Elsaesser 25.

<sup>568</sup> See e.g. Gunning 45-46.

<sup>569</sup> An ostensive analysis of *Algol* implies that, unlike Lang and von Harbou, Werckmeister did not collaborate with his screenwriters regarding the visuals of his film. Indeed, the *mis-en-scènes* throughout Werckmeister's *Algol* exude with visual cues as the storyline allegorically moves from one sign to the other in the zodiac. But the director's ineffective manner in displaying these signs and symbols leads one to assume that, while following Brennert and Köhne's script, he did not understand (or perhaps could not otherwise communicate to the audience) the occult significance underlying the plot.

<sup>570</sup> Original quote in context: „Die heutige Wissenschaft, welche die Katakombenalereien nur eine Episode der gesamten Geistesaktivität jener Epoche sehen kann, wird nicht imstande sein, Wilpert beizustimmen./ Das, was vor Jahrtausenden wirklich den Anhängern esoterischer Schulen oder aber gar allen Mitgliedern einer Sekte einfach schlicht erscheinen konnte, ist für uns, wenigstens beim ersten Blick, zu einem gänzlich unverständlichen Rätsel geworden, die Deutungen aber solcher Meister wie Wilpert sind von Widersprüchen überhäuft und manchmal gar auf

Likewise, Lang produced certain special effects that outside probable astrological explanation remain perceived as all but nonsensical technical tricks and the overdramatic acting characteristic of German Expressionism.

Both Lang's approach to and application of visual sequences in *Metropolis* suggest his indebtedness to the brashly apocryphal scholarship along the lines of Drews, Erbt, and Niemojewski.<sup>571</sup> It is not unlikely that Lang became introduced to similar works during his adolescence, when, as discussed in Chapter Two, he immersed himself in occult literature. Whatever his sources for optical inspiration, the allusions to ancient mythology and astrology were present even in the advertisement posters for *Metropolis*. As in Werner Graul's poster for the film, the encased Maria is analogous to a human who has lost spiritual consciousness of itself due to the Lucifer spirits, as suggested regarding the Gnostic symbolism in Rotwang's laboratory scene. But other posters for the film, such as Fig. 5.1, allude to the Greek myth of Atlas, the titan who, defeated in war against the Olympians, was punished by Zeus to hold up the heavens on his shoulders in order to prevent him from reuniting with his brother, Menoetius. According to the Pan-Babylonians, the fate of Atlas and his brother complemented the Gnostic loathing of the

irrtümliches Sehen gestützt“ Niemojewski, *Astral Geheimnisse* 10.

<sup>571</sup> At times, Lang's inspirations seem to have been intrinsically visual and not contingent on expository context from the Niemojewski's *Astral Secrets of Christianity*. Compare, for instance, Death and the Seven Deadly Sins from the cathedral scene (Fig. 3.1) with Niemojewski's illustrations, which are based on a Hellenistic ivory box containing Christ and the Eleven Apostles under the signs of the zodiac. Both the ivory box and the church cloister present the figures in flowing robes and standing separately along one another in an arched colonnade. Likewise, in both instances, in the arches above the figures are inscribed the “names” of the figures—in *Metropolis*, the label of the Seven Deadly Sins are written on banners; on the box, the signs of the zodiac stand above the corresponding biblical figures. Moreover, closer scrutiny reveals that the designs for Lang's Death and Seven Deadly Sins exhibit similar distinguishing characteristics as the figures whose zodiacal demeanor they share. A few immediate correlations can be made here. For example, Avarice holds his money bag in much the same manner as the apostle under Gemini, often noted for its unsteady judgment and stinginess. Pride flairs his hands in what seems to be an exaggeration of Christ's teaching gesture under the sign of Leo, among whose greatest proclivity is pride. Lust, who fondles her beasts and sways her hips, bears resemblance to the apostle under Scorpio, a sign of sexual depravity. Death himself prepares to play his flute with foreshortened arms, much in the same way the apostle under Pisces, the sign associated with death and endings, plays the fingers of his right hand over the scroll he holds in his left. Likewise, in spite of the fact that they have no correlation, note the similarly raised hands of Wrath and the apostle under Virgo. Envy, which resembles multiple apostles, as well as Gluttony and Sloth are more difficult to place. Of course, Lang's designs for Death and the Seven Deadly Sins may have been arbitrarily inspired by Niemojewski's illustrations.

burden of physical existence and the wish to transcend the confines of the physically bound self (Fig. 5.2).<sup>572</sup> In such a way did von Harbou's prologue to her novel for Metropolis evoke this mythical idea latent in visual cultural products.

Indeed, the oppressed worker in Graul's symbolic poster *does* become liberated at the end of Lang's film in the same way described in Gnostic myths regarding the soul's ascent through the cosmos. The procession of astrological myths outlining this allegorical ascent unfolds subtly yet continuously from scene to scene. Intriguingly, Lang incorporated a methodology not unlike that of the Pan-Babylonians to the astrological underpinnings behind early visual representations of Christian myths. According to Drews, Niemojewski, and others, early Christian visual depictions served elaborately constructed pictograms in which spatial ordering, gestures, and geometric patterns all played essential roles. In order to demonstrate this point, Niemojewski deconstructed a fresco of Christ and the Apostles at the Last Supper as a rendering of the sun and the twelve zodiacal signs.

Lang applied a similar approach to these still images featuring the characters Rotwang (Fig. 5.5) and Maria (Fig. 5.6), which he shot within the first few seconds that these characters formally enter the drama. Not by coincidence, both appearances correspond to the opening shots for the Cancer and Virgo sections, respectively, according to von Harbou's astrological schema. Emulating the aesthetic technique he had formally begun on the set of *Die Nibelungen*, Lang used these particular shots of Rotwang and Maria as proleptic visual cue to signify zodiacal transitions between scenes. By directing the actors Rudolf Klein-Rogge and Brigitte Helm so that their mannerisms would personify

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<sup>572</sup> See esp. the images in Drews, *Das Markusevangelium* 46-47 and Niemojewski, *Astral Geheimnisse* 34-35, both which discuss the esoteric significance of Atlas at length.

the Crab of Cancer (Fig. 5.7) and Young Maiden of Virgo (Fig. 5.8), Lang condensed abstract zodiacal glyphs into human form much the same way that Niemojewski claimed to decode the symbology in the Last Supper and similar frescos. “How can we accept,” Niemojewski asserted, “that on a holy image, especially from this era, such an important issue as the *orientation* [of a participant’s head] could be treated as so arbitrarily! The whole of Christian literature protests against this.”<sup>573</sup> As the next section of this chapter asserts, the same was the case with Lang, whose filmography never left compositional elements to chance.

More often, Lang applied astrological symbology to whole dramatic sequences. As a result, they may be deconstructed chronologically along the same lines that Niemojewski “read” pictorial representations from left to right.<sup>574</sup> Take, for instance, the still in Fig. 5.9. Preceding this moment, Freder is traumatized by the explosion of the M-Machine, which in his shock he immediately identifies as the Ammonite god Moloch. Upon his flight, he flags a white limousine parked conveniently nearby. (The car, much like Freder, is completely forlorn in this city district; not to mention, it is the only *white* car in the entire film.) When he orders the driver, “To the New Tower of Babel – to my father –!”, the car ascends through the upper levels of the city until the youth reaches his father’s office. Starting its speedy chase, the limousine glides across a suspended highway, activating three sets of light shafts ignite as it passes; however, given the daylight and the sheer verticality of these torch-like beams, ultimately hold no practical purpose. Because these motifs unfold as a rapid montage from the depths to the heights of Metropolis, little notice might otherwise be granted these peculiarities; however, in

<sup>573</sup> Original: „Wie können wir annehmen, daß auf einem heiligen Bilde, zumal aus jenem Zeitalter, die Orientation als wichtigste Frage so willkürlich behandelt werden konnte!“ Niemojewski, *Astral Geheimnisse* 17.

<sup>574</sup> See esp. Niemojewski, *Astral Geheimnisse* 16-20.

their context Lang's dazzling special effects actually suggest an oblique reference to a specific Greek myth.

When considered in von Harbou's astrological schema, the themes and motifs in this sequence—Freder's flight from “Moloch,” his white vehicle, and the light shafts it seemingly ignites on his trek to his demigodly father, confirmed in a previous intertitle the “Master of Metropolis”—Lang's own astral depiction becomes clear. This rapid montage constitutes a loose visual retelling of *Bellerophon*, whose myth is associated with the Taurean decan “the Charioteer.” Analogous to Freder, Bellerophon is known for slaying the fire-breathing Chimera and subsequently riding to Mt. Olympus atop the white Pegasus—known for shooting thunderbolts and lightning. But in his hubris the heroic dragon slayer evoked the wrath of Zeus, and Bellerophon was smote from the sky.<sup>575</sup>

The mythic reasons why Freder, in contrast to Bellerophon, fails to conquer his own machine-god beast and yet ascends to his destination (his father's New Tower of Babel) is explicated in the next section. The point here is that, in order to convey optical cross-relations between the dramatic sequences in *Metropolis* and specific astral myths, Lang remained faithful to the astral-Gnostic symbolism of his wife's script by adopting an esoteric heuristic similar to the one by which Niemojewski claimed to have decoded the arcane occult significances behind Christian artwork. Indeed, his soteriological victory mirrors the tragedy that befalls Siegfried in Lang and von Harbou's previous epic (Fig. 5.11).

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<sup>575</sup> For the myth of Bellerophon and Pegasus, see esp. Allen 321-323. See also the discussions of Bellerophon in Boll, *Sphaera* 118; Eduard Stucken, *Astralmythen: Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (Leipzig: Eduard Pfeiffer Verlag, 1907): 477.

## SIGNS IN THE SKY ABOVE METROPOLIS

Below is an astral-mythical analysis of *Metropolis* based on contemporary sources. Due to the constraints of this study, only the signs from Aries to Cancer have been sketched in order to demonstrate ostensibly the precision and accuracy which Lang and von Harbou utilized to imbue this science fiction film with not only the prophetic apocalypticism of Gnosticism but also with the complex ordering device of the zodiac as popularized by *fin-de-siècle* scholars and mystics. Much research must be done in finding sources within Germany; however, the sources used here lay out astrological knowledge apparently common among the themes and topics discussed in the esoteric schools and occult venues at the time. Whatever the sources for their knowledge of the astrology and Gnosticism, Lang and von Harbou utilized their astute familiarity with these themes, motifs, and symbols in order to create their filmic narrative.

*Prelude*

Lang and von Harbou opened their film with an emphasis on dualities and polarities. Two lines of black-uniformed workers switch shifts outside the underground entrance of the Machine Halls, from which one is transported deep below to the subterranean apartments of the Workers' City. The ambiance of this sequence stands in direct contrast to the one immediately following: Freder's merry exploits among his white-clad cronies and bedecked mistresses. Indeed, the symmetry of these two scenes is impeccable. The drudgery of the workers, as well as their abode at the base of the city,<sup>576</sup> is an indication of Pisces. As the twelfth and final sign of the zodiac, whose reign gives way to Aries—embodied by the vertically-opposite luster and the privileged elites at the Club of the

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<sup>576</sup> Further epistemology demonstrates that Lang and von Harbou had additional aesthetic reasons for beginning the film in the middle of the Pisces cycle. See the applicable section for this analysis.

Sons. The viewer rises from the earthen depths to the airy heights, just as death and decay have given way to the renewed promise of life.

This twofold dualism is underscored by the triangle formed in the upward scrolling intertitles that immediately follow the workers' elevator decent:

As  
deep as  
    lay the workers'  
    city below the earth,  
    so high above it towered  
        the complex named the "Club  
        of the Sons," with its lecture halls  
        and libraries, its theaters and stadiums.<sup>577</sup>

As the music trumpets in vigor, this formation might be associated not only with the material concept of labor/capital of the dystopian modernism but also with the spiritual dualism of Aries/Pisces. This transition from the Workers' City to the Club of the Sons is a playful leitmotif chosen by Harbou and Lang, since it signals the zodiacal transfer from Pisces—associated with suffering, subservience, and (anatomically) the feet—to Aries, the sign of enthusiasm, leadership, and the head.<sup>578</sup> These anatomical associations obviously bleed into the alchemical overtones set forth in von Harbou's epigram, but they also point toward the constellations visible from earth. By implying the connections of the microcosmic and the macrocosmic through both word and image, Lang and von Harbou's prologue reaffirms the esoteric nature of the film's otherwise irrational exoteric storyline.

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<sup>577</sup> Original: So /tief /die Stadt /der Arbeiter/ unter der Erde lag, /so hoch über ihr türm- /te sich der Häuserblock, der „Klub der Söhne“ hiess, /mit seinem Hörsälen und Biblio- /theken, und seinen Theatern und Stadien.

<sup>578</sup> The original German text of the opening intertitles forms a golden triangle. Two speculations regarding this visual composition come to mind. First, the notion of a *golden triangle made up of words* resonates with Eliphas Levi's description of cabblistic "Divine Names," whose numerological sum "is a basis of the Hebrew Ritual and constitutes the occult force which the kabalistic rabbins invoke under the title of *Shemamphoras* [i.e., the 72-letter name of God]," Eliphas Levi, A.E. Waite, trans. *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie, Vol. I: The Doctrine of Transcendental Magic* (London: Rider & Company, 1875/1896): see esp. 47. This is significant, since similarly the 'sum' of the letters in the film's intertitles linguistically 'invoke' the elites of the city, who are the 'unconscious gods' of Metropolis.

### *Cycle 1: Aries*

The plot begins with Freder in the towering Club of the Sons. Portrayed as the embodiment of youth, athleticism, and virility Freder wins a footrace at the stadium, and he shows no inhibitions in his flirtatious pursuit of the courtesans in the Eternal Gardens.<sup>579</sup> Above all, he only believes in and acts on his immediate sensory perception. When he encounters a mysterious young woman, later named Maria, the engineer shows himself to be impulsive and naive. Youthful and refreshingly unrefined, Freder's characteristics signify the new beginnings of *Aries*, which, as the first sign in the tropical zodiac, is associated with all the springtime characteristics of the vernal equinox. Because of this position, Aries is a “cardinal” sign and so indicative of action, initiative, great vitality. Accordingly, Freder in this cycle is arrayed in white and physically assertive, as allegorically pure and strong as the Arietian Ram itself.<sup>580</sup>

The great fountain in the Eternal Gardens represents the glyph of Aries (♈),<sup>581</sup> often likened to spring water’s transformative potency to restore health and ensure vitality.<sup>582</sup> Since for the initiate this sign signifies the ablution that awakens thirst for self-

<sup>579</sup> Note that Lang depicted scenes in the Club of the Sons with a faded periphery, as though the elite complex towered in the clouds, or perhaps to capture the dreamlike state of the elites’ existence there. Either way, this mist is not insignificant, since it evokes the naivety and childlike nature of its inhabitants, much like the misty clouds in the land of the Nibelungen (“children of the mist”), covered in rainbows, which Lang already likewise used in his opening scene for *Siegfried*. For the occult significance of the mist of the Nibelungen myth and its correspondence with Atlantean humans. See discussion in Chapter Three.

<sup>580</sup> For discussion on Aries’s association with physical characteristics and health, see Pagan 16-18. Baily explained: “Aries, the ‘birthplace of divine Ideas,’ whether these ideas are souls brought into incarnation and controlled by Mars until they reach the point of reorientation and become sensitive to the influence of Mercury, or whether they are the birth of the ideas of God in the form of the hierarchical plans to which the initiate becomes sensitive. [...] The Sun is exalted in Aries. Here the Sun stands for the life of the spirit which comes to full expression as the result of the great evolutionary process, initiated in Aries. The life of God which in this sign is ‘swung into activity’ eventually achieves consummation. Latency becomes potency and midnight merges into midday. God, the Father, rules.” Ptolemy listed the positive characteristics of Aries as influenced by its planetary ruler Mars: “noble, commanding, spirited, military, versatile, powerful, venturesome, keen, headstrong, active, easily angered, with the qualities of leadership.” Claudius Ptolemy. F.E. Robbins, ed., trans. *Ptolemy: Tetrabiblos* (Cambridge, MA: W. Harvard University Press, 1940/1980): 353. For the relation of the constellation Aries alone to the vernal equinox, see esp. Seiss 233 and Bullinger 104.

<sup>581</sup> Van der Meulen describes the element water as the representation of “a pure, reflecting element, the essence of the primal maternal in its versatile nature” (25).

<sup>582</sup> Ptolemy 61.

knowledge, Freder's own symbolic self-cleansing in this scene grants him a holy vision, awakens his self-consciousness as a spiritual being, and ultimately prompts a retreat from the Eternal Gardens that reveals to him his salvific destiny.<sup>583</sup> Appropriately, these three events all transpire before the fountain at the Eternal Gardens, as the youthful Freder pursues one of the equally amoral female servants. Indeed, the servant gestures the sign of Aries multiple times as she calls: "Freder –! Freder –!"<sup>584</sup> When the servant girl stands on the side of the fountain opposite Freder, the camera perspective captures her *through* the cascading fount itself—note the *reclining mermaid* atop the fountain, also in the shot (Fig. 5.11)—as she gesticulates to Freder in the same flirtatious manner. To end the chase, Freder merrily *dips his hands into the water of the fountain*, rendering his playmate disoriented with a handful of sprinkles.

Then, *as if by causation*, the nearby doors of the Eternal Gardens suddenly swing open to present a virginal-motherly apparition, Maria. Surrounded by a cloud of children (a cloud emphasized by Lang's faded focus on the Madonna figure<sup>585</sup>), she gazes longingly

<sup>583</sup> Christ likewise had to seek baptism before his transitive withdrawal into the wilderness. While astral mythicists associated this moment of the Jesus narrative with the end of Aquarius, not necessarily with Aries (see Bullinger 86-87; Erbt, *Das Markusevangelium* 7; Drews, *Das Markusevangelium* 148-149; Seiss 196, 238), there is too much counterevidence in the context of this film cycle that the baptismal connotations elicit the "new beginnings" associated with vernal equinox.

<sup>584</sup> Note that the courtesan's words are the first in the film to introduce Freder; moreover, when Freder responds vigorously—visibly mouthing, "Hier bin ich!" and chasing her around the fountain—this moment symbolizes the hero's Gnostic self-recognition. In the Christian Bible, this response is the exact phrase uttered by the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament, including Abraham (Gen. 22:1), Jacob (Gen. 31:11), Moses (Exodus 3:4), Samuel (I Sam. 3:6), and Isaiah (Is. 6:8), as well as Mary (Matt. 1:20-23; Lk. 1:27-35), Joseph (Matt. 2:13), Ananias (Acts 9:10), and many others in the New Testament, specifically during the individual's theophany. Moses, for instance, experienced his first visionary encounter with Yahweh before a burning bush—likened in Kabbalist symbology to a *fountain*—during his pursuit of a lost lamb. As the Christos, then, Freder experiences his own theophany through his own lamb, Maria, at once the Younger and the Elder Sophia. Niemojewski listed twenty theophanies in the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles alone, which he found central to understanding the esoteric nature of Christian texts; see his *Gott Jesus I* esp. 93-102.

<sup>585</sup> The occult significance behind Lang's visionary cloud is perfectly outlined in Steiner's commentary on the cloud of cherubim surrounding Madonna and Christ child as depicted in Raphael's Sistine Madonna. "In this picture," Steiner notes, "which is available in countless reproductions, we have learned to admire the wonderful purity poured out over the whole form. We have all felt something in the countenance of the mother, in the singular way the form floats in the air, perhaps also in the deep expression of the child's eyes. Then, if we see the cloud-forms round about from which numerous little angel-heads appear, we have a still deeper feeling, a feeling that makes the whole picture more comprehensible to us. I know it seems daring when I say that if one gazes deeply and earnestly on this child in the

at Freder. Her words are directed as much to the young engineer as much as the children. “Look! These are your brothers! ...Look –!” she repeats, like a Gnostic Aeon urging herself and her message to be comprehended by the mortal. “These are your brothers!”<sup>586</sup> Indeed, what has occurred in the symbolic occult subtext of this scene is the ego’s symbolic ablution of itself (Freder), the christening of the profane (the courtesan, an emblem of the pleasure-seeking principle of the Eternal Gardens), and the revelation of the holy, of the psychic (Maria) *in* the profane, *in* the material. Lang directed this scene accordingly: when Freder snatches the courtesan into his arms and woos her in preparation for a kiss, Maria’s emergence into the Garden averts his longing gaze from the provocative love-object to herself, symbolically revealing the chaste in the corrupt.<sup>587</sup>

arms of the mother and on the clouds in the background forming themselves into a number of little angel-heads, then he has the feeling that this child was not born in the natural way, but that it is one of those that float round about in the clouds. This Jesus child itself is such a cloud-form, only become a little denser, as though one of the little angels had flown out of the clouds onto the arm of the Madonna. That would be a healthy feeling. If we make this feeling live within us, then our view will expand and free itself from certain narrow conceptions about the natural connections of life. Just out of such a picture our narrow vision can be expanded to see that what must happen in a certain way according to modern laws could at one time have been different. We will discern that there was once a form of reproduction other than the sexual one. In short, we will perceive deep connections between what is human and the spiritual forces in this picture. This is what lies in it. /If we allow our gaze to wander back from this Madonna into the Egyptian time, we are met by something similar, by an equally sublime picture. The Egyptian had Isis, the figure connected with the words: *I am what was, what is, and what will be. No mortal has yet raised my veil*” (“Lecture I: Spiritual Connections between the Culture-Streams of Ancient and Modern Times; September 2, 1908,” *Egyptian Myths and Mysteries* 7, see also 7-9). Indeed, just as Steiner notes regarding the Christ Child in Raphael’s painting, at this point in Lang and von Harbou’s story Freder appears as merely one “child” (as the previous intertitles insinuate) among many. Accordingly, it is only when the courtesan calls out his name—the moment of symbolic self-recognition portending inner illumination—that Freder’s identity is revealed to the audience and, upon the ablution, the misty vision of Maria manifests itself to his (inner) gaze. Recognizing himself to be a drop of water in the proverbial pool that is the World Soul, Freder’s psychic potential thus “condenses” and is born through Maria.

<sup>586</sup> Original: „Seht, das sind Eure Brüder! Seht –! Das sind Eure Brüder!“

<sup>587</sup> Enough cannot be said about the significance behind Freder’s symbolic ablution, his symbolic cleansing of the courtesan, and the sudden appearance of Maria. A more detailed study will have to demonstrate how von Lang and Harbou’s overtly Arietian scene is perfectly aligned with an early scene in Brennert and Köhne’s screenplay for *Algol*, though associated with a different zodiacal sign, viz. Aquarius. Only a brief discussion can be made in this footnote concerning the pertinent sources for astral myths. For a discussion on the fountain of youth, see also the section „Die Höllenfahrt der Istar“ in Alfred Stucken, *Astralmythen* (1907) esp. 245-247; 9-13, which discusses how Istar descended into the underworld in order to rescue her lover Tammuz. In accordance with Stucken’s observations, Erbt asserted „die Geschichte von der Fahrt zu den Gerasenern ist mithin eine Höllenfahrtsgeschichte“ (25-27) featuring a discussion on the fountain of youth, the life-giving tree, and the enlightenment of man by woman, whose mythic symbology, as both scholars indicate, share striking similarities with the Greco-Roman myths of Orpheus and Persephone—an astral myth associated with Aquarius (see e.g. Erbt, *Jesus* 7). This myth has striking similarities with the *symbolic* descent of the light-clad Maria to Freder in the presence of the dark-clad courtesan—i.e., as the Younger Sophia, or other Aeon, appearing to a mortal in the physical realm. But indeed, it more faithfully aligns with the early scene in Brennert and Köhne’s screenplay for *Algol*, specifically the Aquarius cycle, in which Leonore Nissen descends into the mines and appears to the shirtless, white-shimmering Robert Herne and the dark-clad Maria Obal,

Centrally located throughout this scene is the figurine adorning the fountainhead: the reclining mermaid. As an ancient symbol of man's dual nature as both *animal* and *god*, this aquatic being mirrors Freder's self-cleansing as well as his immanent transvaluation in the Machine Halls. More importantly, the mermaid atop the fountain bears a striking resemblance to a decan of Aries—*Cassiopeia*, “the Enthroned Woman.”<sup>588</sup> Stroking her golden hair in a reclined position,<sup>589</sup> Cassiopeia is always depicted as a queenly woman of matchless beauty.<sup>590</sup> But while exalted in her dignity, this royalty of Greek mythology is—much like her aquatic counterpart—equally reputed for her vanity. Having boasted that she and her daughter Andromeda were more beautiful than all the other nymph-daughters of the sea god Nereus, Cassiopeia prompted the wrath of Poseidon, who ordered the queen to be bound to a rock to await her fate by the sea monster Cetus. Seeking to spare herself, Cassiopeia (and her husband Cepheus) appeased the sea gods by sacrificing Andromeda.<sup>591</sup> Beginning at this fountain (Fig. 5.12), Freder's quest for Maria transpires as an industrialized transliteration perfectly faithful to these astral-mythical motifs.

As the centerpiece of the scene, the water fountain is Lang and von Harbou's cue not merely for its iconographic resemblance to the glyph of Aries but also because the sign's

who has just given him a refreshing drink. Lang and von Harbou converted this Piscean motif into an Arietian one, viz. through the myth of Cassiopeia. Instead of Aquarian waters, which presage springtime, they emphasized the Arietian fountain of youth.

<sup>588</sup> For astral mythical details of the constellation Cassiopeia itself, see esp. Bullinger's discussion “Cassiopeia: ‘The Enthroned Woman’,” on 107-112. See also Drews, *Das Markusevangelium* 148-149; n2 164, which does not discuss the constellation with regard to Aries in particular. For the significance of the Cassiopeia myth at the vernal equinox, see Niemojewski, *Gott Jesus II* 372-374.

<sup>589</sup> Bullinger draws a diagram of Cassiopeia's five brightest stars that—perfectly resembling the mermaid's pose—form an “irregular ‘W.’” Bullinger 107-108. For a discussion of Cassiopeia, her throne, sea-nymphs, and other associations, see Richard Hinckley Allen, *Star-Names: Their Lore and Meaning* (London: G.E. Stechert, 1899): 142-143.

<sup>590</sup> The breasts of the constellation Cassiopeia, located near the Milky Way, were held to signify her effusion of “heavenly milk” (*die himmlische Milch*); see Drews, *Das Markusevangelium* 164. Note that the mermaid, breasts erect, ‘lactates’ her own life-giving waters, the source of Freder's ablution. [SEE VIRGO SECTION: HEALING FEMININITY].

<sup>591</sup> For the myth of Andromeda, Cetus, and Cassiopeia as pertaining to Aries (and the Piscean approach of Aries), see Allen 143-146; Bullinger 101-104; Seiss 225-230, 242-245. See also Allen 34-35.

own occult characteristics were believed to have associated with shamanistic initiation ceremonies. Hence, the proud and amoral elites of Metropolis, emblematised by the nymph-like courtesan,<sup>592</sup> live leisurely at the sacrificial expense of the workers, embodied by their figurehead Maria. By diverting Freder's attention to (and affection for) his playmate, Maria—whose salvific purity, fertility, and versatile nature is exemplified through her maternal element, the fountain waters<sup>593</sup>—alters the youth's perception, revealing to him a vision that is altogether other and yet beautiful. The vision Maria reveals is herself, the metonym for both the feminine psychic power and universal brotherhood of Metropolis crying out for reconciliation and redemption.

Thus, this hero and heroine's fate appear sealed in the zodiacal matrix by their own freewill. As intruder in the Gardens, Maria plays Eve who comes to Adam with the gnosis of the Serpent, Rotwang. When Freder then accepts to follow her in pursuit of knowledge, she becomes the Andromeda to Freder's Perseus, the Magdalene to his Christ,<sup>594</sup> the Kriemhild to his Siegfried.<sup>595</sup> Likewise, just as the hero Perseus arrived in time to kill the sea monster, save Andromeda, and ultimately become her husband, so also has Freder accepted the same destiny by his oblation. However, Lang and von Harbou's mythical city of the future is rife with paradoxes and contradictions in which, as Freder will soon discover, *destiny*, unlike fate, *must be seized*.

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<sup>592</sup> Implicitly, Joh Fredersen, most blameworthy for the fate of the workers, is expressed in the king Cepheus, who is not symbolized in Lang and von Harbou's scenario. For Cassiopeia's association with other wealthy women of ill repute, see Niemojewski, *Gott Jesus II* 373-374. For a discussion of Cassiopeia, her throne, sea-nymphs, and other associations, see Allen 142-143.

<sup>593</sup> On esoteric symbolism of water, see van der Meulen 25.

<sup>594</sup> On the marriage of Christ and the Church according to Andromeda and Perseus, see Seiss 235-236; cf. 217-232; Bullinger 174-175. For the correlation that Cassiopeia represents Mary Magdalene seeking resurrection through (and implicitly union with) Christ, see Allen 145.

<sup>595</sup> According to Germanic lore, when Kriemhild was abducted by a dragon, Siegfried rescued her and was given her hand in marriage. This version of the myth does not appear in Lang and von Harbou's cinematic adaptation. See also the discussion of St. George and the Dragon in Pagan 6.

The ensuing incident in the Machine Halls marks a turning point in Freder's journey. Confused and forlorn, Freder recoils at the sight of a giant machine. Later identified as the "M-Machine," it is manned by twelve black-clad workers who attend to its dials, blinking lights, and levers. Suddenly one worker collapses from exhaustion and the machine immediately overheats, spewing steam skyward as operators propel through the air. Significantly, this violent spectacle is indicative of *Mars* (♂), the planetary ruler of Aries. For this reason, it is only appropriate that Freder's Arietian aggression, virility, and unrestrained sanguinity are struck down by a sequence akin to industrial battle<sup>596</sup>—warfare being a well-known astrological association of Mars. Enwreathed in steam, the machine transforms into a bull-like deity—which Freder identifies as Moloch—into whose gaping maw workers are cast to a fiery death. In what seems a hallucinatory vision, the machine-god's inexhaustible appetite consumes the lives of its operators, who, now stripped naked and bald, are whipped into submission and led up the stairs for the sacrificial rite. Then, masses of uniformed workers lockstep in rows of six up the stairs toward the mouth, marching like soldiers into the furnace. Paradoxically, Freder's encounter with the machine-god doubly marks his initial descent into matter after answering the call of his syzygy Maria as well as his first *anamnesis* by Luciferic Rotwang *vis-à-vis* the machine-god.

The central struggle of this theophany concerns the two remaining decans of Aires. The constellations include *Cetus*, the sea monster, and *Perseus*, its slayer—obviously represented by Moloch and Freder, respectively.<sup>597</sup> In accordance with the Greek myth,

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<sup>596</sup> Kaes argues that the workers sacrificed in this scene represent "worker-soldiers," the casualties of industrial warfare. See Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema* 169-171. See discussion on the associations of war and Mars in Aries in Pagan 5-7.

<sup>597</sup> Historians have often commented on the similarities between Freder's encounter with Moloch and the scene of Siegfried's victory over the fire-breathing dragon in *Die Nibelungen*, often contrasting the difference in the outcome

the constellation Cetus is also known as “the Great Enemy bound” and Perseus “the Breaker” who delivers the monster’s (in this case) captives.<sup>598</sup> Adapted also in Lang and von Harbou’s *Die Nibelungen*, this narrative underlies Siegfried’s victory over the dragon form of Fafner in his quest to win Kriemhild’s hand.<sup>599</sup> However, while true to the allegorical composition of these myths, *Metropolis* betrays the entire outcome of the mythic duel between man and beast. Here, the victor is not man but rather machine—man’s own invention. This outcome is partly explained by Freder’s Arietian demeanor: His overconfident pursuit of Maria belied his apparent vulnerability against repressed horror. As Drews observed about Christ and Buddha’s flights from normalcy, to gaze within oneself with profundity—just as Freder, seeking knowledge, plunged ardently into the depths only to discover an “inner crisis” in *Metropolis*—is to lay oneself open to all types of “evil spirits” and “wild beasts.”<sup>600</sup> Before basking in the virginal-motherly countenance of Maria, which he eventually discovers below the Machine Halls and the Workers’ City, Freder must atone himself by confronting these demons.<sup>601</sup>

### *Cycle 2: Taurus*

During this cycle, the narrative focuses on the introduction of Freder’s father, Joh Fredersen. Stubborn and antireligious, Fredersen is the personification of the zodiacal

of the two heroes’ exploits (e.g. Gunning 35).

<sup>598</sup> For the similarities between astral myths of Cetus and Perseus, see esp. Bullinger 112-118 and Seiss 245-254.

<sup>599</sup> As discussed in the next cycle on Taurus, Moloch and the Fafner dragon hold great astrological significance. See Stucken’s discussion about the narrative motifs behind “dragon fighters” (*Drachenkämpfer*), including Siegfried and Perseus, on 174-179.

<sup>600</sup> Drews offers perhaps the best account of the spiritual impediments (both *böse Geister* and *wilde Tiere*) that incur upon the initiate after baptism his subsequent withdrawal, linking Christ’s sojourn into the Desert with the spiritual transformations of, among others, Buddha’s own temptation (*Der Markusevangelium* 75-76). Bullinger and Seiss refer to numerous “wild beasts” whose astral myths signify impediments to spiritual growth. For reference to Cetus, see Bullinger 116; 51, 123-124, 169. Seiss 272-273. See also Levi, Vol. I 32.

<sup>601</sup> Overcoming this challenge is necessary for Freder to pass along his initiatory path: “Aries, which at different points along the Path of Life forces the soul on to the burning ground and subjects it to a purifying process during incarnation. Through the lesser fire of mind, the ‘jungles of experience are set on fire and dissolve in flames and then the Path stands clear and unobstructed vision is achieved’ [...] Through the fiery processes of war and strife, brought to the individual through the influence of the planetary ruler, Mars, the God of War, a needed purification takes place.” Bailey 95-96.

Bull, *Taurus*—the sign of the builder, productivity, and personal responsibility—whose brightest star is called “the governor” or “the leader.”<sup>602</sup> The proverbial Demiurge and a model Taurean, Fredersen labors tirelessly in his office at the New Tower of Babel, exhibiting his strength by his manipulation of bizarre mechanisms and vague bureaucratic connections.<sup>603</sup> At this moment, by running to his father for help, Freder still does not recognize his status as Christos but rather a child of the vindictive Creator. But while Fredersen takes action as the “Master of Metropolis,” in this cycle Freder learns that his father’s power extends only so far.

Starting his flight from the Machine Halls, Freder flags a limousine and orders the driver: “To the New Tower of Babel – to my father –!”<sup>604</sup> There is ironic self-reflexivity in his command to reach the tower/father, since the ensuing two-dimensional elevation of the New Tower of Babel, crowned with its overarching cantilevers and dome, bears striking resemblance to the glyph of Taurus (♉). A radially symmetrical superstructure, the tower abstracts not merely the glyph of Taurus, but also the sign’s characteristic territorialism as it overshadows a spectacle of glistening skyscrapers that eclipse expressways and suspended bridges, teeming with automobiles, aircraft, and pedestrians (Fig. 5.13). Similarly, the glyph-like tower represents Fredersen’s willpower to amass financial wealth and his icy calculation of material progress and efficiency.<sup>605</sup> Most significantly, the turgid structure, like the glyph, reflects his stern paternalism over his city, whose inhabitants symbolize his children. Likewise, if the New Tower of Babel abstracts his fatherly gaze over the elite of Metropolis, among the workers this Taurean

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<sup>602</sup> Stucken 6-7; cf. Bullinger 121; Seiss 264.

<sup>603</sup> See discussion below regarding Taurus’s planetary ruler, Venus.

<sup>604</sup> Original: „Zum neuen Turm Babel – zu meinem Vater –!“

<sup>605</sup> See esp. Pagan 28-30.

paternalism finds expression in what scholars frequently associate with “the Bull of Taurus”—Moloch itself.<sup>606</sup>

By abstracting Fredersen as Moloch, the Bull of Taurus, Lang and von Harbou underscored Freder’s transition from the warlike characteristic of Aries into the no-nonsense zone of Taurus with all its objectivity and icy calculation. Staggering and carried on litters, the haunting silhouettes of workers pass before Freder, who grimaces at the shadowy procession as his contrasting white silk underscores his naivety and privileged otherness.<sup>607</sup> No doubt Freder’s situation is an allusion to the Four Signs of the Buddha,<sup>608</sup> a myth that, like Jesus’s journey into the wilderness,<sup>609</sup> epitomizes all the allegorical terrors that beset the novice spiritual seeker. Just as Siegfried wanders into the presence of the fire-breathing dragon after leaving his tutor Mime in *Die Nibelungen*,<sup>610</sup> so does Freder realize (yet only *after* his Arietian trauma) that he has all but abandoned the watchful care of “the Hireling” (*Luzidmal*)—i.e., the ancient Babylonian name for the constellation of Aries.<sup>611</sup>

The Taurus sequence expresses Fredersen’s emanating power through abstracted degrees of light. Even the city itself coalesces into an expressionistic collage from atop the tower, where, standing at the office window, Freder laments: “Your magnificent city,

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<sup>606</sup> Drews directly associated the Amorite god Moloch with the zodiacal sign Taurus in *Das Markusevangelium* 266.

<sup>607</sup> Moreover, von Harbou’s novel tells that this is the young man’s first time alone. His life of privilege is so marked by constant surveillance that the walls of his house are cobbled with secret eyeholes through which the “lifeless gaze” of his servants peer. Not only do his servants wait to satisfy his every whim, they also monitor his every move to his father who—in the film, just after Freder’s flight from the Eternal Gardens—is identified as “the Master of Metropolis” (*Metropolis* 12-13). The servants, much like the Gnostic Archons, are not servile, pernicious, or evil by nature; rather, they are functionaries whose purpose preserves, *but by no means enforces*, the utter lack of self-consciousness among the ruling elites of Metropolis.

<sup>608</sup> Given von Harbou’s love for Eastern religions, I have no doubt that she was fully conscious of this Buddhist myth when composing her novel. She had long exhibited vast knowledge of Hindu and Buddhist religiosity and mystical traditions in her works, including her novel and the screenplay for *Das indische Grabmal* (1920), as well as the Chinese scenarios in *Der müde Tod* (1922).

<sup>609</sup> For comparisons of Jesus’s “Struggle with Satan” to the astral myths of other dragon slayers, including Perseus, see „Kapitel 15: Der Kampf mit dem Satan,“ in Niemojewski, *Gott Jesus II* 251-258.

<sup>610</sup> See discussion on Gunning 35.

<sup>611</sup> Langdon 162-163.

Father— and you the head of this city – and all of us in the light of the city... --.” He points to cobbled high-rises, zigzagging trusses, and staggered skyscrapers, inquiring, “...and where are the people, Father, whose hands built your city –?” When Fredersen replies, “Where they belong....,” the screen dissolves to a descending elevator filled with black-clad workers. Freder’s words seem to drive them further downward: “...in the depths...?”<sup>612</sup> Immediately before and after this exchange, Josaphat fails to inform Fredersen about two incidents: 1) the explosion of the M-Machine, and 2) the strange maps found in the bodies of the subsequently injured workers—both which compromise Freder’s image of his father. This incompetence compels Fredersen, *compass in hand*, to banish his assistant to “the depths.” Evocative of William Blake’s Urizen,<sup>613</sup> Fredersen embodies conventional reason and law, which he exercises to punish his children by propelling them from his purported life-giving presence, thus creating and constraining his universe.<sup>614</sup>

Not only does this sequence demonstrate the Taurean propensities to amass riches by relentless means and to succumb to the trappings of luxury and conformity,<sup>615</sup> it signifies

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<sup>612</sup> Original: Original: „Deine herrliche Stadt, Vater – und Du das Hirn dieser Stadt – und wir alle im Licht dieser Stadt... --,/ „...und wo sind die Menschen, deren Hände Deine Stadt erbauten-- --?“/ „Wo sie hingehören....“ [...] „Und wenn die in der Tiefe aufstehen gegen Dich?“

<sup>613</sup> While to my knowledge no historians have correlated Lang and von Harbou’s films and Blake’s paintings, the latter definitely seems to have had an impression on the former in this and other films. For example, the self-induced trance of the character Prof. Baum in *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse* (1933) very much resonates with the wide-eyed mystics and seers of Blake’s artwork. After all, scholars have long demonstrated that many of Lang’s visuals were inspired by nineteenth-century artists; see esp. Lotte H. Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1952/1973).

<sup>614</sup> The *mis-en-scène* perfectly demonstrates that in order to survive in the light of Metropolis, one must exercise full knowledge of their mechanics, their functions, and their purpose. When Freder enters, his father’s chief secretary feverishly copies from a message board formless expressions of numbers stream endlessly down, while three other secretaries record Fredersen’s every word. Emphasizing this in her novel, von Harbou contrasted the cool, damp climate of the tower and the boiling heat of the city below, making similitudes to processes of condensation and evaporation with the falling numbers on the board, as well as characters’ ascending the levels of the tower. This theme is quite in keeping with Gnostic teaching, in which the Demiurge, the “false light” who panders his power to humanity as the highest in existence though in reality it is not.

<sup>615</sup> By possessing this outlook and demeanor, Fredersen personifies the zodiacal Bull. Pagan explained in detail that the “religious tendency of the Taurean is occasionally conspicuous by its absence” (26-28). In the 1920s, Taurus was said to represent the modern lifestyle: “The Bull, therefore, in expression is dual. Today we see the willful dash of the

two decans of Taurus. The first is *Eridanus*—the “River of the Judge,” described by Seiss as “a great tortuous river” which flows “down into the regions of darkness in the underworld.”<sup>616</sup> These connotations were no less terrifying in Greek mythology, which claims this celestial river signifies the stream of souls passing up and down. At the climax of her novel, von Harbou likened the towering vertical path of the paternoster to a bloody stream atop which Fredersen gazes with supposed indifference.<sup>617</sup> Similarly distressed by his unforeseen discharge, for the remainder of the workday a stupefied Josaphat rides the paternoster whose “cells, like scoop-buckets, gathered men up and poured them back out again.”<sup>618</sup> Punished to be a worker, the ex-bureaucrat is avoiding

lower nature of humanity, embodied in the forces of aggression, and the purposeful progress of those people and peoples who seek, even if without full understanding, to work out the plans of God, proceeding in spite of each other. That is as far as the evolutionary processes have yet taken humanity and hence the critical situation now to be found. The question is: Will the Bull of desire or the Bull of divine illuminated expression succeed? This sign is an earth sign and hence the working out of the Plan or the fulfillment of desire must be carried out upon the outer plane of living. This will or desire must express itself in the plane of outer living and in the environment whether it is the environment of an individual man, of a nation or of a group of nations. [...] Again, gold is the symbol which today governs man's desires whether national, economic or religious; it is connected with this sign and this is one of the indications that today the conflict in the world economic situation is based upon the upwelling of desire.” Bailey 378-379.

<sup>616</sup> Seiss 273, 274; Bullinger 129-133. See also Drews, *Das Markusevangelium* 157-158; and Stucken 70. Allen observed a detail that may not be coincidental to the zodiacal succession of von Harbou's narrative, the design of Fredersen's New Tower of Babel, and a common depiction of Cetus the Sea Monster: “Cetus [i.e. Moloch] is sometimes represented swimming in the River Eridanus [i.e. vertical filmic space between the New Tower of Babel and the Machine Halls], although usually as resting on the bank with four paws in the water; its head, directly under Aries, marked by an irregular pentagon of stars [i.e., the five-sided top of Fredersen's tower], and its body stretching from the bend in Eridanus to that in the Stream of the Urn” (161).

<sup>617</sup> Also during the climax of her novel, von Harbou described the New Tower of Babel and its paternoster as an escape portal for all the workers in the city. Albeit oblique, the elevator's association Eridanus is significant since the New Tower of Babel, in addition its metonymic link to Fredersen as “Judge” of the proverbial river, is the only known portal in Metropolis connecting the hellish Machine Halls with the divine upper world. (Of course, the book mentions there is one other, Rotwang's trapdoor. Fredersen and Rotwang's purportedly sole access to the underworld signify them jointly to be the notorious Lucifer-Demiurge, the “Dweller on the Threshold” [*Hüter der Schwelle*], as discussed in Chapter Four.) Though he has lost complete control of his city during the tumult, Fredersen sits in repose at the top of the tower while the paternoster shows itself to be a river of blood. Panicking people descend from the tower and flood into what, due to the revolting workers, have become hellish streets: „Der Rundbau des neuen Turm Babels spie Menschen aus, die sich, wie Narren lachend, zur Straße drängten. Der Menschenbrei auf der Straße saugte sie ein. Der Neue Turm Babel wurde menschenleer. Die seinen Säle und Gänge bevölkert hatten – die von den Schöpfemern der Paternoster-Werke zur Tiefe, zur Höhe geschüttet worden waren, – die sich auf den Treppen staunten, – die Befehle empfangen und weitergegeben hatten, – die in Zahlen erstickten, – die das Raumen der Welt belauschten, – alle, alle entströmten dem Neuen Turm Babel, wie aus ausgeschnittenen Adern Blut strömt, bis er grausig leer, entblutet, dastand. / Aber seine Maschinen lebten noch fort.“ Von Harbou, *Metropolis* 205. Accordingly, Fredersen's machines at the other end of his judge's river rage through the fury.

<sup>618</sup> While not explicitly associating the paternoster to a celestial river of damnation, von Harbou's implications are obvious for the discharged Josaphat, who refuses to step out of the tower's elevator, collect his final wages, and move into the subterranean Workers City: „Der Mann, der Joh Fredersens Erster Sekretär gewesen war, stand in einer Zelle des Paternoster-Werkes, das den Neuen Turm Babel als nie stillstehendes Schöpfad durchschnitt, – mit dem Rücken gegen die Holzwand gelehnt, machte er die Reife durch das weiße, sausende Haus von der Höhe der Kuppe zur Tiefe

his inevitable expulsion to the paternal Moloch. In addition, just above Eridanus stands the decan *Orion*—known as “the Brilliant,” “the Giant, and “the Mighty Hunter.”<sup>619</sup> With his lofty perch of power resonating with Orion’s placement in the sky, Fredersen strikes a pose reminiscent of Orion when overlooking the city (Fig. 5.14). He also exhibits Orion’s predatory might by hiring his henchman Slim to investigate “every move taken by my son.”<sup>620</sup> In both cases, Lang and von Harbou depicted these decans less in visual subtext than through the mechanical and bureaucratic devices of Fredersen’s abstracted power.

But what is the esoteric rationale behind this polarized expression of the Bull of Taurus as simultaneously Fredersen and the M-Machine? In order to understand this fission, Fredersen’s interaction with his son must further be compared to Lang and von Harbou’s medieval equivalent of this dynamic: the tension between Siegfried and Fafner. In fact, the dynamic behind these conflicts echoes the astral myth of the Taurean decan *Auriga*, often called “the Charioteer” in Greek mythology.<sup>621</sup> When reconciling the surviving versions of *Nibelungen* myths for their epic 1924 film, Lang and von Harbou had similarly chosen to split the Taurean figure Fafner into both his *dragon* and his *dwarf*

des Kellerraumes und wieder zur Höhe der Kuppe zum dreißigsten Male – und rührte sich nicht vom Fleck. [...] / In seinem Rücken summte das Paternoster-Werk. Die Zellen – Schöpfeimer – faßten Menschen und gossen sie wieder aus“ (von Harbou, *Metropolis* 39, 41). Note that, for the workers and Josaphat alike, failure to accomplish intellectual duties has repulsed them from the light and reduced them, quite literally, to listless numbers.

<sup>619</sup> For discussions on Orion myths in Taurus, see Allen 303-304; Bullinger 124-129; Niemojewski, *Gott Jesus* II 421-422; and Seiss 268-273. See also Drews, *Das Markusevangelium* 94.

<sup>620</sup> Full quote from the original: „Von heute an wünsche ich, über jeden Schritt meines Sohnes genau unterrichtet zu werden....“

<sup>621</sup> For astral myths surrounding Auriga, see esp. Bullinger 133-137; and Seiss 279-282; see also Allen 83-84. As Seiss indicated, even the Greeks did not seem to agree on a definitive myth for this decan. But, as discussed in the previous section, Lang’s visuals undeniably hearken to the myth Bellerophon. If the fleeing Freder played a cowardly version of Perseus against Moloch-Cetus in the previous Aries cycle, then it is all too appropriate that he play a retreating version of the hubristic Bellerophon who tells of his conquest of Moloch-Chimera to Fredersen-Zeus upon his white car-Pegasus in the corresponding Tarsus cycle. As Stucken noted, the Perseus and Bellerophon myths mirrored one another and were “consubstantial”: „Schon hat Preller nennt Bellerophon ,eine dem Perseus nahe ver wandte Gestalt [...]. Ich möchte noch weiter gehen und Bellerophon und Perseus für wesensgleich erklären. Hier liegt eine Spaltung derselben Sagengestalt vor. Motive, die der Perseussage fehlen, finden sich in der Bellerophonsage, und umgekehrt. Beide ergänzen sich“ (171). See also the discussion of Bellerophon in Boll, *Sphaera* 118.

forms—a trope that, when transliterated into *Metropolis*, equates machine with fire-breathing beast and technocrat with ruthless subhuman. Having slain Fafner in his dragon form, Siegfried rides his white stallion into the foggy Odenwald, the magical forest where the Alberich (i.e., the dwarf Fafner) awaits him in a forked tree. When Freder loses against the maw of Moloch, he boards a white car, riding it to his father's cloudy realm of economic abstraction. Once again, this industrialized astral myth aligns beast (dragon-dwarf/horse) with machine (Moloch-engineer/car), and rugged Teuton (Siegfried) with neurasthenic man (Freder).

The cross-relations of these astral myths lead to paradoxes for Christos and Demiurge alike. On the one hand, Freder's weaknesses become his strengths over his solar kinsman Siegfried, whose instantaneous mastery over both forms of beast cost him in the long term. In fact, it is the cosmopolitan bourgeois' intellectualism that distinguishes him from the first solar hero, who, reckless from repeated victory, does not notice the fig leaf that falls on him when he bathes in the dragon's purificatory blood. Upon Freder's horror at purificatory "fires of Moloch," the astrological "man-eater" (*Menschenfresser*),<sup>622</sup> no such galvanization occurs, but instead the opposite—a revelation of his own temporality as well as the limits of his father's purported omnipotence and omniscience. Both pieces of *wisdom* change Freder's tactics after addressing his stubborn father at the New Tower

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<sup>622</sup> Of course, Lang and von Harbou's film soon discloses the existence of other technologies in the Machine Halls, but at this point in the story "Moloch" remains the only known machine, emphasizing that the workers are the biblical "children of Moloch" which the Ammonites sacrificed to "pass through" the purifying fires of Moloch (e.g. Lev. 20:2, Jer. 32:35). Thus, Fredersen plays both as the workers' Demiurge but also their father who sacrifices them to his machines (designed by Rotwang). For references to astral myths about solar heroes like Siegfried, Bellerophon battling fire-breathing "man-eaters," see Stucken 477. As Lang's visuals imply, von Harbou's novel repeatedly explains that the demonic machines' life force is fueled by the sacrificial workers' hearts and brains (e.g. von Harbou, *Metropolis* 33-34). Ancient cultures associated the vindictive Moloch with Mars, Yahweh, and Typhon (Stucken 18-19), which is significant in *Metropolis* since all three of these gods find respective parallels in 1) Taurus, the sign cycle of this particular scene; 2) Fredersen, who plays as a god sacrificing to his own city; and 3) Rotwang, who has designed the city's occult technology. Recall that Steiner equated Typhon and Lucifer during modern times in "Lecture II," *Search for the New Isis* 26-27. [SEE LEO FOR DISCUSSION ON CHRONOS, Stucken 290-294]

of Babel. Moreover, it is the terrified Freder who escapes in the car—not his prideful predecessor on the horse—who curbs the wrath of his adversary.

On the other hand, Fredersen withholds fundamental advantages that Alberich lacks. While Siegfried decapitates the vindictive dwarf with the magical sword that the Nibelungen forged “in the fire of blood,” Fredersen hoards his subterranean treasury from his son to impede any patricidal counterattack. Besides, when Siegfried beheads Alberich, the dwarf curses the youth’s lineage and commands that his enslaved minions turn to stone with his death. But retaliation by Taurean rage would negate Freder’s salvific altruism central to liberating the workers, since, according to Lang and von Harbou’s esotericism, to cut off the “Head” of Metropolis would be to kill its “Hands” and its “Heart” as well. Thus the mythic advantage that the futuristic engineer/machine has over the primeval dwarf/beast. But Freder shares in this advantage too, just as Siegfried loses in the unseen fig leaf and the damnation of his own offspring. Likewise, while Siegfried seizes the dwarf’s magical sword inadvertently to kill off the remnants of a world of enchanted creatures, in the following cycles Freder will harness the energy of his father’s metallic machines—forged, as the Machine Man later asks the workers in the deceptive guise of Maria, in the fiery blood of their operators: “Who oils the machine joints with their own marrow?! Who feeds the machines with their own flesh?!”<sup>623</sup>—in order to transcend the banal oppression in Metropolis.<sup>624</sup>

But if Fredersen is the symbolic father of his city’s inhabitants, then who is their mother? This answer will be explicated in the upcoming Cancer cycle, but in light of the

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<sup>623</sup> Original: „Wer schmiert die Maschinen-Gelenke mit seinem eigenen Mark –?! Wer füttert die Maschinen mit seinem eigenen Flesch –?!” For the corresponding passage in the novel, see von Harbou, *Metropolis* 182-185.

<sup>624</sup> As Freder’s conviction to liberate the workers grows in this Taurean cycle, he mirrors Bailey’s outline of the neophyte as “he passes from Aries to Taurus, because desire has at last been transmuted into aspiration” (108).

previous chapter's discourse on Gnosticism the answer is obvious: Hel. Similar to the ignorant Demiurge who prostituted his mother the Younger Sophia in order to wield his own creation, in the process of constructing his futuristic dream city Fredersen lost his wife. As discussed in the previous chapter regarding the vengeful worldview of Robert Herne in Hans Werckmeister's *Algol* and the gendered Gnostic consequences for his unwillingness to admit the psychical (*feminine*) reality behind his professedly materialist (*masculine*) Bios-Works, Fredersen denies all evidence of the supernatural properties behind his city's technologies.<sup>625</sup> In order to convey that Fredersen, in spite of his convictions, unwittingly holds his universe together with an occult force, Lang emulated almost exactly an image of Werckmeister's Demiurge (cf. Fig. 4.3 & Fig. 4.4). Undoubtedly, the round-topped compass Fredersen grasps at his office desk while wielding his power represents the womblike ankh of Hel, whom (though his true love) he symbolically represses in captivity.<sup>626</sup>

This visual correlation between Herne's infamous key to the Hall of Eternal Power and Fredersen's otherwise innocuous compass may seem convincing enough in terms of *fin-de-siècle* Gnostic mythology and comparative religions, but Lang and von Harbou implemented this subliminal ankh of Isis in order to emphasize a special astrological significance behind this particular scene.<sup>627</sup> As the tool by which Fredersen designs his city, this compass-ankh represents *Venus* (♀), the planetary ruler of Taurus.<sup>628</sup> Like all zodiacal houses, the personal characteristics of Taurus are guided by its planetary ruler,

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<sup>625</sup> Refer to Gnostic-gender symbolism in previous chapter.

<sup>626</sup> For a detailed description of the Taurean characteristics in love and friendship, see Pagan 25-26.

<sup>627</sup> Undoubtedly, Lang and von Harbou consciously emulated Brennert and Köhne by implementing the ankh of Isis at this precise moment in their virtual remake of *Algol*. In fact, by some means Lang and von Harbou must have understood their predecessors' intentions in utilizing the ankh-shaped key to the Hall of Eternal Power, since Brennert and Köhne systematically placed their own ankh at the sign of Taurus in their film.

<sup>628</sup> See esp. discussion of "Mother Earth," the Virgin Mary, and Venus in relation to Taurus in Pagan 21-23. See also discussions of Venus as Taurus's planetary ruler in Ptolemy 185-187; and Niemojewski, *Gott Jesus* II 264.

whose influence confirms the suspicion that Fredersen's good fortune are not the result of pure enterprising genius. Collectively, they explain this Demiurge's uncanny achievement:

Venus [...] causes fame, honor, happiness, abundance, happy marriage, many children, [...] the increase of property, a neat and well conducted manner of life, paying honor to those things which are to be revered; further, she is the cause of bodily health, alliances with the leaders, and elegance of rulers [...]; she brings about [...] successes, profits, and the full rising of rivers; of useful animals and fruits of the earth she is the preeminent cause of abundance, good yields, and profit.<sup>629</sup>

Admittedly, the compass's planetary significance is not entirely evident in this cinematic segment utterly void of *any* reference to femininity whatsoever. But the novel's corresponding passage to the Taurean scene at the Tower of Babel is dominated by Freder's estranged longing for the apparition Maria and his departed mother, i.e. the Elder Sophia and the Younger Sophia. The young engineer's distress underscores not only his *psychically* awakened state but also his will to abandon the *physical* pleasures of the Club of the Sons and return to the allegorically womblike realm of Pleroma.<sup>630</sup> Watching his children slide down a metaphorical Eridanus with the stance Orion, "the Brilliant," Fredersen shows himself to pander the Gnostic "false light" of the Demiurge, which belongs not to him but to Younger Sophia—in this case, Hel. Leaving this Bull of Taurus to brood over the cryptic maps, Freder the Christos, only son of the Elder Sophia, ends this cycle by taking his first covert step in descending toward the Younger Sophia—in this case, Maria.

### *Cycle 3: Gemini*

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<sup>629</sup> Ptolemy 185-187.

<sup>630</sup> See the discussion of this scene in the footnotes of the previous chapter under the subsection 'Fantasies of Redemption.'

Resolved in his opposition to this father, Freder descends once more into the Machine Halls. A Christ having returned from the wilderness to begin his ministry, this hero's mission is no less vague than his command to his new disciple: "Go home, Josaphat, and wait for me.... I have a long way to go tonight... In the depths,— to my brothers...."<sup>631</sup>

When Freder descends again into the Machine Halls, the shadowy Archon Slim awaits his return to the ground level of the city by loitering at a newsstand. These motifs—twoness, journeys, and sibling relationships—are indicative of Gemini and set up the mood for the next cycle of Lang and von Harbou's film. In the tropical zodiac, Gemini is the first constellation considered in classical astrology to be "bicorporal," or double-bodied, and is represented by the Twins.<sup>632</sup> Corresponding to the sign's bicorporal nature, this cycle portrays Freder's first conscious attempt to unify the two halves of the city. In ancient cultures as in Metropolis, the challenge of Gemini includes the overcoming of dilettantism and indecision and the fashioning of a coherent and consistent unity from a previously fragmented whole.

Entering from an inconspicuous door, Freder strains to see through the squalid, smoke-choked labyrinth of machinery. In its center stands what in the novel von Harbou called the Paternoster Machine, whose metal frame is explicitly modeled after the glyph of Gemini (♊). Accordingly, most the scene's drama occurs at this iconic machine, which appears to be an electricity-routing device whose operator must match up lighted bulbs

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<sup>631</sup> Original: „Gehen Sie heim, Josaphat, und warten auf Sie auf mich.... Ich habe heute nacht noch einen weiten Wege zu gehen.../ In die Tiefe, – zu meinen Brüder.“

<sup>632</sup> While the term "Mutable" was used by modern astrologers like Bailey and Pagan to describe the four constellations marking the solstices and equinoxes, Ptolemy used the word "bicorporal." Because Lang and von Harbou ostensibly based their twelve cycles on the classical planetary rulers in the tropical zodiac, this study fittingly uses the classical terminology. As Ptolemy explained the structure of the zodiac: "The bicorporal signs, Gemini, Virgo, Sagittarius, and Pisces, are those which follow the solid signs and are so called because they are between the solid and the solstitial and equinoctial signs and share, as it were, at end and beginning, the natural properties of the two states of weather [...]. The bicorporal signs make souls complex, changeable, hard to comprehend, light, unstable, fickle, amorous, versatile, fond of music, lazy, easily acquisitive, prone to change their minds" (67-69).

on a two-handled human-sized dial (Fig. 5.15). Utilizing this *mis-en-scéne*, Lang and von Harbou orchestrated Freder's encounter with the listless worker as a witty reiteration of solar myths surrounding the Twins of the constellation Gemini. When Freder approaches the black-clad operator with the curious address, "Brother....," the machinist collapses in Freder's white-silken arms and protests, "There *must* be someone at the machine!"<sup>633</sup> Freder assures him, "There *will be* someone at the machine..." (then, in a separate intertitle) "I."<sup>634</sup> The original German word, „ICH,“ plays on its double meaning, "ego," confirming Freder to be the theosophical "I-being" descending into the existential depths<sup>635</sup> to intercede for the id in the depths of the unconscious. Thus, taking the hand-dials, he says: "Listen to me.... I want to switch my life with yours...."<sup>636</sup> Known later as "No. 11811," then "Georgi, as indicated on his linen cap, this young man and Freder appear very much alike with their light complexions and blonde hair.

Freder and Georgi's realized status as "brothers," their respective residences in 'heaven' and 'hell,' and their 'incarnations' into one another's realms suggest a common mythos behind the Twins of Gemini that is perhaps best known in its Greek version. According to the Greeks, the constellation Gemini signified the "twins" Castor and Pollux, who, though both mothered by Leda, were fathered by the Spartan king Tyndareus and the high god Zeus, respectively. Upon their deaths, the mortal Castor descended into Hades while the immortal Pollux ascended to Mt. Olympus. Devastated by his brother's fate, Pollux begged his father to grant Castor part of his own immortality, so Zeus agreed to let the brothers reside alternatively between Hades and Mt.

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<sup>633</sup> Original: „Es muss ein Mensch an der Maschine sein!“

<sup>634</sup> Original: „Es wird ein Mensch an der Maschine sein.... / ICH.“ For the challenge of Geminian to overcome his particularly egotistical nature and contribute to those in his life, see esp. Pagan 38-40.

<sup>635</sup> See Steiner's discussion about the I-being's exploration of the self in "The World-Historical Significance of the Blood That Flowed on the Cross: March 25, 1907, Berlin," *The Christian Mystery* esp. 69-70.

<sup>636</sup> Original: „Höre mich an... Ich will mein Leben mit Dir tauschen...“

Olympus.<sup>637</sup> Not only do Georgi and Freder echo Castor and Pollux's reciprocal 'incarnations' by switching lives, their body language also hearkens to image of the constellation itself. Just as Pollux stands to the right of Castor clasping his celestial sibling with his left hand,<sup>638</sup> so too does Freder embrace his brother with his left (Fig. 5.16). Assuming control of the Paternoster, he gives his Georgi the address to Josaphat's apartment and commands, with Geminian undertones: "Wait for me – both of you (*beide*)."<sup>639</sup> Faithful to the implications of his wife's script, with every perspective of his camera in this scene Lang replicated the constellation of the Twins by capturing Freder on Georgi's right side.

If here Freder once again falls short of his astral kinsman by failing to persuade the Master of Metropolis to liberate his condemned twin, then he also differs from Pollux in taking initiative to save his own Castor even against his father's wishes. In her novel, von Harbou underscored Georgi's estranged relationship with this bourgeois patriarch in more certain terms by recounting the wretched operator's incoherent prayer to his Paternoster Machine. When Freder initially approaches him, he hears Georgi babbling—

Pater-noster.... that means: "Our Father! ...Our Father, who art in heaven!" We are in hell, Our Father! ...What is Thy name? Art Thou called Paternoster, Our Father? Or Joh Fredersen? Or Machine? ...Be hallowed by us, Machine. Paternoster! ...Thy kingdom come.... Thy kingdom come, Machine.... Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.... What is Thy will of us, Machine, Paternoster? Art Thou the same in heaven as Thou art on earth? ...Our Father, who art in heaven, when Thou callest us into heaven, shall we guard the machines of Thy world, – the great wheels, which break the limbs of Thy creatures, – the great flywheels, upon which Thy beautiful stars turn, – the great merry-go-round called the earth? ...Thy will be done, Paternoster! ...Give us this day our daily bread.... Grind, Machine, grind flour for our bread. The bread is baked from the flour of our bones... And forgive us our trespasses... what trespasses,

<sup>637</sup> For accounts of Castor and Pollux in the context of Gemini, see esp. Allen 222-226, 229, 231; and Bullinger 137-140.

<sup>638</sup> For image of Gemini, see e.g. Bullinger Plate XXXII.

<sup>639</sup> Original: „Wartet auf mich – beide...“

Paternoster? The trespass of having a brain and a heart, which Thou hast not, Machine? And lead us not into temptation. ...Lead us not into temptation to rise against Thee, Machine, for Thou art stronger than we, Thou art a thousand times stronger than we, and Thou art always in the right and we are always in the wrong, because we are weaker than Thou art, Machine... But deliver us from evil, Machine.... Deliver us from Thee, Machine.... For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen... Pater-noster, that means: "Our Father... Our Father, who art in heaven...."<sup>640</sup>

By playing on the liturgical *Pater noster* from the Roman Catholicism of her youth, von Harbou depicted a delirious Georgi who, caught in the vain repetition of industrial labor, strains body and mind to ascertain his existential torment while questioning the links and limitations between the machine-god before him, its distanced paternal creator above him, and himself in the Machine Halls.<sup>641</sup> Through their management of filmic space Lang and von Harbou were able to accentuate visually helplessness Georgi's evident lack of coherence and consistency.

While Georgi's prayer resembles the elevator in its purely vertical bond between father and child, the entrance of his "brother" Freder will challenge him to overcome his torn Geminian nature through a horizontal relationship.<sup>642</sup> Paradoxically, the above

<sup>640</sup> Original: „Pater noster ... das heißt: Vater unser! ...Vater unser, der du bist im Himmel! Wir sind in der Hölle, Vater unser! ...Geheiligt werde dein Name! ...Wie ist dein Name? Heißest du Pater noster, Vater unser? Oder Joh Fredersen? Oder Maschine? ...Sei uns geheiligt, Maschine, Pater noster! ...Dein Reich komme ...Dein Reich komme, Maschine... Dein Wille geschehe wie im Himmel also auf Erden... Was ist dein Wille mit uns, Maschine, Pater noster? Bist du auch im Himmel, wie du auf Erden bist? ...Vater unser, der du bist im Himmel, werden wir, wenn du uns in den Himmel rufst, dort die Maschinen deiner Welt bewachen, – die großen Räder, die in deiner Kreaturen die Glieder zerbrechen, – die großen Schwungräder, an denen sich deine schönen Sterne drehen, – das große Karussel [sic], das Erde heißt? ...Dein Wille geschehe, Pater noster! ...Unser täglich Brot gibt uns heute... Mahle, Maschine, Mehl für unser Brot! Aus dem Mehl unserer Knochen wird uns das Brot gebacken... Und vergib uns unsere Schuld... Welche Schuld, Pater noster? Die Schuld, ein Hirn zu haben und ein Herz, das du nicht hast, Maschine...? Und führe uns nicht in Versuchung... Fuhr uns nicht in Versuchung, gegen dich aufzustehen, Maschine, denn du bist stärker als wir, du bist tausendmal stärker, und du bist immer im Recht, wir sind immer im Unrecht, weil wir schwächer sind als du bist, Maschine... Sondern erlöse uns von dem Übel, Maschine... Erlöse uns von dir, Maschine... Denn dein ist das Reich und die Kraft und die Herrlichkeit in Ewigkeit, Amen... Pater noster, das heißt: Vater unser... Vater unser, der du bist im Himmel...“ (von Harbou, *Metropolis* 44).

<sup>641</sup> For mythic accounts of brotherhood generally associated with Gemini, see esp. Seiss 286-290.

<sup>642</sup> Bailey observed that, "in Gemini, the disciple can come to some intelligent grasp of what we might call the consciousness-mechanism and of the life processes which enable man finally to be what he is. [...] The mystery of the sign is in reality concerned with the secret of the response which should and eventually will exist between the two brothers, between the two poles—soul and form—and between the mortal self or personality and the immortal self or soul" (367).

prayer even clarifies the esoteric significance behind the sign of the Twins. By distorting Jesus's original words through the mouth of a delirious machinist, von Harbou actually engaged themes long promulgated in Western occult doctrine concerning the Lord's Prayer.<sup>643</sup> Popularized during the modern revival of Gnosticism by *fin-de-siècle* mystics like Heindel and Steiner,<sup>644</sup> the prayer was essential to cultivating a meditative self-awareness able to reconcile one's astral, the etheric, and physical bodies (the so-called threefold human spirit) into harmony with one another, thus relieving oneself of inner division, discord, and doubt<sup>645</sup>—again, characteristics of Gemini. Overwhelmed by the likelihood he will lose his own brain (astral body) and heart (etheric body) to the banal mechanization in the hellish Machine Halls (physical world), Georgi also presages, albeit unwittingly, the young engineer's initiative to switch lives with his anonymous "brother" marks the young engineer's first gesture toward achieving von Harbou's prescribed reconciliation of Head (superego) and Hands (id) by the Heart (ego).<sup>646</sup>

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<sup>643</sup> For parallel themes between von Harbou's work and popular occult teachings behind Lord's Prayer; see esp. Steiner, "Brief Remarks by Rudolf Steiner on the Lord's Prayer: October 20, 1904, Berlin-March 11, 19013, Munich" (201-202), which mentions the prayer's links to common Theosophical teachings. See also Hartmann, *Magic: Black and White* 137.

<sup>644</sup> The pervasiveness of this prayer in Western esoteric schools cannot be understated. According to his fellow Anthroposophists, Steiner "prayed the Lord's Prayer—daily, upright, and aloud." Before the Great War it was remarked that he recited the prayer "so loudly in his Berlin apartment that it could be understood in the neighboring room" (n1 in "The Lord's Prayer: as Prayed by Rudolf Steiner," *The Christian Mystery* 200).

<sup>645</sup> See esp. Steiner, "The Lord's Prayer: February 4, 1907, Karlsruhe," (203-215), which discusses alchemical notions, the three parts of the threefold spirit (the astral, the etheric, and physical bodies), the transmutation of the I-being toward the deity; as well as "The Lord's Prayer Considered Esoterically" Parts I and II, given January 28 and February 18, 1907, respectively, in Berlin (221-235, 235-248), which, also considering the threefold human spirit in relation to the deity, discuss Jesus's prayer in relation to human evolution and Buddhist and Hindu doctrines. See also Heindel, "Lecture XVIII: The Lord's Prayer," *Rosicrucian Christianity Lectures* 292-308, esp. Diagram 16 (*ibid.* 306), in which Heindel visually depicts the ego's reconciliation of deity and the dense body.

<sup>646</sup> Unfortunately, this study has not discussed at length the profound connections between von Harbou's allegorical Head, Hands, and Heart with the threefold spirit of Theosophy, Rosicrucianism, and Anthroposophy. This is the subject for future research. In his *Cosmo-Conception*, Heindel laid out a succinct apologetic describing the esoteric Christian significance behind the Lord's Prayer and its relation to the threefold human spirit. Because his exposition describe precisely Freder's reconciliation of the workers and the elites, Heindel's quote is worth quoting at length: "The Lord's Prayer, given for the general use of the Church, gives Adoration first place, in order to reach the spiritual exaltation necessary to proffer a petition representing the needs of the lower vehicles. Each aspect of the threefold spirit, commencing with the lowest, raises itself in adoration to its corresponding aspect of Deity. When the three aspects of the spirit are all arrayed before the Throne of Grace, each utters the prayer appropriate to the needs of its material counterpart, all three joining in the closing prayer for the mind./ The human spirit soars to its counterpart, the Holy Spirit (Jehovah), saying 'Hallowed be Thy Name.'/ The life spirit bows before its counterpart, The Son (Christ),

The godlike Freder's appearance to the neurasthenic Georgi evokes a Gnostic Aeon descending upon a bereaved human to deliver a reassuring message: "Brother...." As though hurled down by an overwhelming psychic force upon recalling his primeval fall from higher realms of existence, Georgi collapses immediately into this angelic visitor's arms.<sup>647</sup> Thus, by laying aside his wish to find Maria (i.e. his syzygy, literally his other half) and voluntarily relieving Georgi as a brother, an equal, the humble Freder reveals himself to be a savior. Because it is inextricably tied to his role as brother, Freder's role as savior proves again perfectly in keeping with the esoteric significance attributed to the Lord's Prayer by *fin-de-siècle* mystics. Moreover, the son of Joh Fredersen, like Jesus, empties himself in the form of a servant and *does not consider equality with his father something to be grasped*—"even to the death of the cross."<sup>648</sup> By trading places with Georgi and 'incarnating' among the workers, Freder takes one step away from identifying as Joh Fredersen's son and one step toward his symbolic identity as the Gnostic Christos. But these Geminian twins' switching identities soon evokes a pervasive question regarding the ambivalence of vertical filmic space in Lang and von Harbou's *Metropolis*: Which brother is passing into *heaven*? Which is passing into *hell*?

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saying 'Thy Kingdom Come.' / The divine spirit kneels before its counterpart, The Father, with the prayer, 'Thy Will be done.' / Then the highest, the divine spirit, petitions the highest aspect of the Deity, the Father, for its counterpart, the dense body: 'Give us this day our daily bread.' / The next highest, the life spirit, prays to its counterpart, the Son, for its counterpart in the lower nature, the vital body: 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.' / The lowest aspect of the spirit, the human spirit, next offers its petition to the lowest aspect of Deity for the highest of the threefold bodies, the desire body: "Lead us not into temptation." / Lastly, in unison, all three aspects of the threefold spirit in man join in the most important of the prayers, the petition for the mind, in the words: 'Deliver us from evil.' The introduction, 'Our Father Who art in Heaven,' is merely as the address on an envelope. The addition, 'For Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, forever. Amen,' was not given by Christ, but is very appropriate as the parting adoration of the threefold spirit as it closes its direct address to the Deity" (465-466).

<sup>647</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two, the links between portrayals of neurasthenia and *anamnesis* in German Expressionist cinema are uncanny.

<sup>648</sup> The connection between Pauline epistemology and Freder is prophetic of what happens to Freder at the Paternoster machine in the upcoming Leo cycle, viz. his crucifixion. "For let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man. He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross. For which cause God also hath exalted him, and hath given him a name which is above all names: That in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth: And that every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:5-11).

The answer to this question manifests in the three decans of Gemini: *Lepus* (“the Hare”), *Canis Major* (“the Greater Dog”), and *Canis Minor* (“the Lesser Dog”).<sup>649</sup> The first of these decans is represented by Georgi in his ascent to the upper levels of Metropolis. Though initially successful in concealing his identity from Freder’s chauffeur and (unwittingly) Slim, who trails behind him, Georgi becomes tempted by the cosmopolitan crowds, exotic women, and glimmer of the nocturnal city. Upon finding money in Freder’s clothes, Georgi has himself driven to Yoshiwara, the red-light district, where he succumbs to nightly pleasures. “Rough-footed” (*dasypus*), “swift” (*velox*), and then “light-footed” (*levipes*) upon his liberation, Georgi lends living expression to the ancient Roman qualifiers attributed to the mythic Hare, known for its mischievous energy.<sup>650</sup> Similarly, by betraying Freder, he personifies the Egyptian, Syrian, and Hebrew names of his decan. After living in drudgery “Bound with Chains” (*Rakis*), he seems to become Freder’s “Deceiver” (*Sugia*), and, for that reason, he is *Bashti-Beki*, i.e. a composite of “confounded” and “failing.” In Hebrew, the name for the brightest star in *Lepus* is “the Enemy of He Who Cometh” (*Arnebo*), a rather accusatory, if not harsh, name redolent of Georgi’s infidelity towards Freder.<sup>651</sup>

This Hare was invariably despised among ancient cultures for its association with scorching heat. As a punishment for its wreaking havoc on earth, the Greeks claimed, *Lepus* “was placed in the heavens to be close to its hunter, Orion.”<sup>652</sup> Portrayed almost universally as the trusty hunting dog of Orion, *Canis Major* is appropriately represented in this cycle by Fredersen’s competent sleuth, Slim. Just as in the Taurus cycle Fredersen

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<sup>649</sup> The misleading nomenclature of these decans reflects the mixed mythologies behind them, which, though consistent in their themes, vary in terms of content.

<sup>650</sup> Allen 265; Stucken 136.

<sup>651</sup> Bullinger 141; Seiss 298, 299.

<sup>652</sup> Allen 265. Even the poet Aratus relished in the hunt of *Lepus*, writing: “Below Orion’s feet, the Hare/ Is chased eternally” (Bullinger 141).

functioned as Orion atop the Eridanus, so has Slim set forth in the current Gemini cycle as his anthropomorphic canine.<sup>653</sup> According to the Romans, Janitor-Lethaeus, the Keeper of Hades, appointed the noble beast to a southern Cerberus, “the watchdog of the lower heavens, which in early mythology were regarded as the abode of demons.”<sup>654</sup> In her novel and screenplay, von Harbou alluded to Slim’s status as *Canis Major* in depicting him discreetly watching for Freder just outside the Machine Halls—the entrance to the ‘hell’ of Metropolis—in the same way that Lang envisioned this sly gumshoe hiding nonchalant behind newspaper at a bustling newsstand. Of course, when Georgi emerges from the Machine Halls, Slim believes himself to be trailing Freder. But von Harbou played on her sleuth’s honest error in chasing Georgi, the Hare, in order to produce a symbolically fitting motif.

Lastly, and somewhat marginally, Freder represents *Canis Minor*. In spite of its tiny size, the Egyptian, Arabic, and Greco-Roman astrology systems associated this decan’s luminaries—especially its brightest, *Procyon*—with immanent redemption and “foretold wealth and renown.”<sup>655</sup> By allowing himself to be “burdened, loaded down, [and] enduring for the sake of others” (*Al Gomeisa*), Freder identifies himself as “the Prince” (*Mirsam*) and mediator.<sup>656</sup>

As discussed above regarding the “light” and “dark” sungod motif propagated by the Pan-Babylonians and mystics of the Gnostic revival, Georgi and Freder’s emulation of Castor and Pollux underscores the rudimentary esoteric doctrine common to all Geminian

<sup>653</sup> Allegedly because of this mythic dog’s diligence, the Phoenicians called *Canis Major* “the Barker” (Allen 125).  
<sup>654</sup> Allen 118.

<sup>655</sup> Allen claimed these positive characterizations of *Canis Minor* were universal (133). See also Bullinger 145; Ptolemy 57; Seiss 306.

<sup>656</sup> Freder’s descent and eventual redemption to the higher levels of Metropolis is even presaged in the myths of *Canis Minor*, albeit obliquely. According to Greco-Roman variants, for example, this decan represented Helen’s favorite dog, which, once lost in the Euripus Strait, she prayed to Jove it might live again in the sky (Allen 132). For more on the Arabic stars *Al Gomeisa* and *Mirsam* Bullinger 145, 146; Seiss 306-307; Allen 134-135.

twins. Just as the Gnostic Christians designated the births of Jesus and his forerunner-cousin John the Baptist near the winter and the summer solstices, respectively,<sup>657</sup> so did von Harbou designate Freder's incarnation into *black* clothing to symbolize his death (spiritual dormancy) as an elite as well as Georgi's birth (physical dormancy) into *white* clothing and his commission as Freder's forerunner.<sup>658</sup> The rotary locomotion of the Paternoster, thus, complements the drama in this cycle. Marking the place where Freder and Georgi undergo their 'incarnations' into one another's worlds by switching their clothes, the mechanism emblematises the eternal sway of cosmic light and darkness. Indeed, Freder will not appear again in white silk until the cycle for Sagittarius, the sign directly opposite Gemini in the tropical zodiac.

Freder's successful persuasion of Georgi to help his cause for brotherhood is perfectly in keeping with the mythos of Gemini since it belies the immediate tragedy of his ministry in the same way that the annual Midsummer's Day belies the physical world's subsequent decay into the dormancy of winter. His betrayal stems not from bitterness but instead from every negative attribute of Gemini with regard to its planetary ruler, *Mercury* (☿).<sup>659</sup> In regard to Gemini, Mercury produces people who are "utter rascals, precipitate, forgetful, impetuous, light-minded, fickle, prone to change their minds, foolish rogues, witless, sinful, liars, undiscriminating, unstable, undependable, avaricious, unjust, and, in general, unsteady in judgment and inclined to evil deeds."<sup>660</sup> Georgi, then,

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<sup>657</sup> For the correlations between John/Jesus and Castor/Pollux, as well as other Gemini twins like Romulus and Remus, esp. Niemojewski's section „Himmelzwillinge,“ *Gott Jesus II* 307-320. In his *Die Leugnung der Geschichtlichkeit Jesu in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Karlsruhe: G. Braun, 1926), Drews praised this section of Niemojewski's research for its thorough exposition on astrological and syncretistic knowledge, though he admitted this complexity convoluted his work (144-145).

<sup>658</sup> For discussion of John the Baptist and Jesus at the summer solstice, see Pagan 49.

<sup>659</sup> Georgi's embodiment of Mercurian characteristics in this cycle is all the more appropriate since, like the Greek god, he functions as a messenger between the two 'worlds' of Metropolis. See comments on Mercury in Pagan 35.

<sup>660</sup> Ptolemy listed these as the negative characteristics with regard to Gemini under planetary ruler Mercury (361).

is an archetypal Gemini in this scene.

As upcoming scenes make evident, von Harbou utilized these traits to play on the notorious Betrayal of Jesus by Judas, who for thirty pieces of silver forsook his Savior to be crucified. (The despised decan *Lepus* was noted to have been associated with Judas among early Christians; hence, in this cycle Georgi represents both Judas *and* the Hare.)<sup>661</sup> While in their zodiacal readings of heretical Gospels the Pan-Babylonians associated this passage with Scorpio rather than Gemini, von Harbou's placement of this mythos in its complementary house helps her scene point away from Freder's role as brother and toward his upcoming atonement as a Christ figure. It is also noteworthy that by engaging Gnostic texts in biblical criticism, the Pan-Babylonians denied the orthodox position that Judas betrayed Jesus out of hatred. Instead of a greedy fiend indifferent about his Teacher's execution, these scholars understood Judas to be a confidant who the Savior secretly entrusted to "turn him over" to the authorities, a linguistic nuance, they indicated, far more faithful to the original Greek than even the translations of many orthodox scriptures.<sup>662</sup> Thus, in juxtaposing the watchful Slim's ignorance with the

Bailey confirmed Ptolemy by saying that psychically "the result of the activity of Mercury as it rules Gemini is to produce a steady pull between the pairs of opposites" (358). While Georgi certainly personifies these shortcomings, he does not possess the positive traits Ptolemy added for Gemini under Mercury: "thoughtful, learned, and inventive." For Freder as for Georgi, the Twins of Gemini, the same lesson is central to switching lives in one another's realms: "Through the activity of Mercury, the man whose Sun is in Gemini is aided to attain the synthesis of soul and form." Bailey 365. See also Pagan 38-40 for the "primitive" attributes of Gemini in Mercury.

<sup>661</sup> Early Christians were not alone in this association, which seems to have been rooted in an ancient correlation between the Jews and the moon. Regarding *Lepus*, Allen quoted another scholar saying: "The problem which perplexed the ancients, why the Mighty-hunter and his Dog should pursue the most timid of creatures, is solved when we recognize that Orion was generally a solar time, and that the Hare is almost universally a lunar type." For this reason, Allen continued, the decan inspired various world cultures to associate this star formation with other entities and groups likened with the moon; hence, among Christians: "Those biblically inclined saw here the Magdelen [sic] in tears; or Judas Iscariot; and, in the earlier record, the patriarch Jacob; Isaac with the wood for the sacrifice [...]" (266-267). Erbt especially discusses the correlations between *Lepus* and the Moon throughout his work (see e.g. Erbt, *Das Markusevangelium* 51, 72, 112), while Stucken mentions *Lepus* among constellations commonly associated with the Moon (394-395).

<sup>662</sup> The Pan-Babylonians also discussed the Gnostic interpretation of Judas's "betrayal" of Jesus, which understood the disciple not as a greedy fiend but instead as a confidant the Savior trusted to "turn him in" to the authorities, a term which, they indicated, was a more accurate translation of the original Greek than the orthodox "betrayed." See esp. the section entitled „Der ‚Verrat‘ des Judas Iskarioth.“ Drews, *Das Markusevangelium* 245-247, 265. Not coincidentally,

confounded identities of Freder and Georgi, von Harbou devilishly fused the normative and Gnostic versions of this biblical account with overtly Geminian themes.

#### *Cycle 4: Cancer*

This cycle introduces the “inventor” (*Erfinder*) Rotwang as much as Hel, his deceased lover who had left him for Fredersen before becoming the mother of Freder. As this love triangle suggests, conflict brews when Fredersen visits the inventor to ask if he will decode the maps found in his workers’ pockets. Prefiguring Rotwang as the antagonist of the film, this cycle occurs exclusively in the inventor’s house, which, sitting “in the middle of Metropolis [...], had been forgotten by the centuries.”<sup>663</sup> The wild-haired Rotwang’s shy demeanor and his tendency to cling to the past instead of seizing his potential signify him as the Crab of Cancer. Indeed, malevolence, indefiniteness, and other vices attributed to Cancer seem to motivate his personality throughout the film.<sup>664</sup> Even this inventor’s strange name could be considered to suggest a turtle—viz. the red-eared slider, or *Rotwangenschildkröte*—a common emblem for Cancer.<sup>665</sup> When Lang’s camera introduces Rotwang, he is crouched at his laboratory desk (Fig. 5.5) in a position resonant with the sign’s glyptic representation of a crab’s claws (☒).<sup>666</sup> Rotwang’s

von Harbou’s novel and screenplay are closer to this interpretation than to conventional orthodox interpretations of this story.

<sup>663</sup> Original: „Mitten im Metropolis lag ein seltsames Haus, das die Jahrhunderte vergessen hatten.“

<sup>664</sup> Bailey on the traits of Cancer: “This sign, Cancer, being concerned primarily with the world of causes, has about its inner meaning much indefiniteness and an apparently vague subtlety which proves most elusive to the ordinary thinker” (312-313).

<sup>665</sup> As Boll indicated, the turtle, which he and other scholars associated with „späteren orientalischen Tierkreisen“, exhibits many of the same instinctual characteristics as the crab in the occidental zodiac: „Ganz dieselbe Unsicherheit herrscht hinsichtlich der Schildkröte (vgl. Hommel S. 261 f.): sie ‚vertritt‘ mehrmals den Ziegenfisch, erscheint aber auch einmal neben ihm und ist somit für Hommel hier das ‚Gegenbild‘ im Sternbild des Krebses. Andere werden mit dem gleichen Recht schließen, daß sie immer für den Krebs eingetreten sei, und sich dafür auf Jensen berufen können.“ (*Sphaera* 205). For their similarities in appearance and character, the turtle and the crab are understandably interchangeable metonyms. For example: “The Crab symbolizes imprisonment (the hard shell and the rocks under which the Crab ever takes shelter). [...] The slow moving Crab, identified with its dwelling place and carrying its house upon its back, lives upon the land (physical plane life) and also in the sea (the life of the emotions).” Bailey 179, 317.

<sup>666</sup> Likewise, this glyph is said to represent a woman’s breasts, since Cancer is also associated with nostalgic affection

obsessed devotion to his experiments has cost him his right hand, which he replaced with a claw-like prosthetic. In this cycle Lang and von Harbou conveyed the notion that, similar to his crablike appearance, Rotwang's lifestyle embodies Cancerian attributes.

An anthropomorphism of his abode, Rotwang lives torn between the ancient past and the ultramodern present. In his film Lang replicated to the letter each detail von Harbou outlined in her novel regarding his bizarre house. A counterpart to the city's medieval cathedral, Rotwang's house is a node of gothic images as well as scientific devices. Ironically, while Metropolis has neglected the cathedral because of the seeming obsolescence of religion, Rotwang's house, though literally blackened with age, has functioned as the think-tank for all the technological wonders that dominate Metropolis (see discussion in Chapter Two).<sup>667</sup> In the novel, the house was designed and built by a magician "from the East" and is rumored to have stood longer than the town itself.<sup>668</sup> Throughout their film, Lang and von Harbou used this house and its secrets to disclose as much about these vague origins of the house and Rotwang's mystical knowledge as the estranged relationship between Fredersen and Rotwang. As discussed in previous chapters regarding Rotwang's allegorical association with the Luciferian "Light Bringer" and the Semitic Algol, von Harbou's "inventor" is a deceitful practitioner of both modern and medieval sciences by whose joint power he reluctantly aids the skeptical Fredersen in governing Metropolis.

During the course of this scene, it becomes apparent that the alchemist-scientist is motivated not so much by his love for science as by his hatred for Joh Fredersen. In both

and motherhood—a double meaning which becomes important in this scene.

<sup>667</sup> Even a promotional pamphlet for the film described him as having "created the electrical marvels of the city."

"Metropolis" Magazine," unpaginated.

<sup>668</sup> Von Harbou, *Metropolis* 57.

the novel and film, von Harbou disclosed this rivalry *vis-à-vis* the epitaph on Rotwang's secret shrine dedicated to Hel. Waiting for Rotwang in a gloomy room, Fredersen draws open a curtain concealing a small alcove in which stands the enormous stone head of a woman (Fig. 5.17). Again, the pedestal reads:

HEL  
BORN  
UNTO ME AS A FORTUNE [*Glück*], UNTO ALL MANKIND AS A BLESSING [*Segen*].  
LOST  
TO JOH FREDERSEN.  
DIED  
AS SHE GAVE LIFE [*das Leben schenkte*] TO FREDER, JOH FREDERSEN'S SON.<sup>669</sup>

By cleverly conveying the representative roles of Fredersen and Freder as the Demiurge (Creator) and Christos (Word made Flesh) from Gnostic mythology, respectively, in this scene von Harbou revealed Hel's dual role as the Elder and the Younger Sophia. As Rotwang's former lover and Fredersen's underappreciated wife, she represents the Younger Sophia, whose manifest wisdom in the physical world, though beloved by the "Light Bearer" Lucifer coming from beyond in the Pleroma, is despised and abused by her son, the Demiurge. As the mother of Freder, the savior officially designated in the film's previous cycle, she represents the Elder Sophia.

While Rotwang claims to identify Hel as his lost companion, the occult subtext of this scene reveals that, contrary to surface appearances, Hel stands as motherhood personified to all men in Metropolis and that, as such, her introduction in this filmic scene pertains to the planetary ruler of Cancer, the Moon (☽).<sup>670</sup> By highlighting his beloved's successive identity as life-giving companion of the past on the one hand *and* the lost, dead mother of

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<sup>669</sup> Original: „HEL,/ GEBOREN MIR ZUM GLÜCK, ALLEN MENSCHEN ZUM SEGEN./ VERLOREN AN JOH FREDERSEN./ GESTORBEN, ALS SIE FREDER, JOH FREDERSENS SOHN, DAS LEBEN SCHENKTE.“ For the parallel passage in the novel, see von Harbou, *Metropolis* 76.

<sup>670</sup> See discussion of the Moon in Cancer in Pagan 49-50.

the present on the other, the enshrined inscription bespeaks Rotwang's penchant to keep alive the past Hel (life-giving companion) while relegating the immediate present Hel (lost, dead mother). Esoterically, his perception of Hel suggests humanity's perception of the Gnostic Sophia according to corporeal existence *this side* of the Pleroma. For mankind as for Rotwang, the Younger Sophia (i.e. the life-giving companion Hel) exists here and now but remains intangible to his senses, while the Elder Sophia (i.e. the dead mother Hel) is for all purposes dead because she has forsaken him for Fredersen—or, at least, humanity is dead to her because *it* has forsaken *her* by falling into matter, the realm of the Demiurge.

Rotwang is not alone in clinging to the dead mother. Upon discovering the giant statue, Fredersen becomes visibly emotional and gropes longingly toward its haunting visage on the pedestal. In her novel, von Harbou clearly expressed how Fredersen has sheltered his only son from the world simply *because* Freder was born by Hel. Hence, for Fredersen as for Rotwang, the treasured memory of Hel as a radiant life-giving companion remains ever alive, viz. through their son, but for Fredersen Hel's *life-giving* quality exists only because of her capacity as *mother*.<sup>671</sup> In Gnosticism, the case is similar with the Demiurge, whose only true love towards the Younger Sophia existed before he violently raped her to *create* the physical realm, e.g. when she was but *his mother*.<sup>672</sup> (Indeed, like the Demiurge, Fredersen says in the dialogue of his scene that Hel, this life-giving mother, is “dead” to him.) In response to the somber Fredersen’s

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<sup>671</sup> As Fredersen says when searching for Freder: „Ich habe die Schuld bezahlt, Mutter... Hel ist tot. Jetzt habe ich nur noch Freder. Das ist ihr Vermächtnis. Hels Vermächtnis gebe ich nicht her. Ich bin zu dir gekommen, um dich zu bitten, Mutter: hilf mir, Freder wiederzugewinnen.“ Von Harbou, *Metropolis* 174.

<sup>672</sup> According to the *Pistis Sophia* and other accounts, Yaldabaoth only grew into the malicious Demiurge after his mother the Younger Sophia bemoaned his hideous appearance, realizing the imperfection she had produced out of her own ignorance. Swiney 16-19. [FOR LIBRA SECTION: This Gnostic subtext explains why Rotwang's chief goal in Lang and von Harbou's film becomes to destroy Fredersen's *creations*, Freder and Metropolis, through his own creation, the Machine Man.]

discovery of Hel's statue, Rotwang enters the room almost immediately and tears closed the curtain in a vehement, defensive gesture. Not coincidentally, both men's respective reactions to the statue during this scene—grievous surrender and self-protective instinct—express nostalgia to return to the *motherly* Hel, and as such are representative of Cancer.<sup>673</sup>

Fitting for both the Elder Sophia in Gnosticism and the woman of desire in German Expressionism, Hel is the hidden narrative trigger of—and, as shall be seen, the resolution for—all the spectatorial conflict between Fredersen, Rotwang, and her one true son, Freder.<sup>674</sup> Appropriately, like the moon, the motherly Hel 'reflects' the feminine inspiration that all three men derive from her. As discussed above, the name "Hel" evokes the German adjective "bright" (*hell*), an obvious allusion to the illuminative self-knowledge the Elder Sophia inherited from the Gnostic Supreme Being (here, symbolically the sun) and by which she brought the Yaldabaoth, who became the Demiurge, into being. For this reason, it is no coincidence that *Joh* Fredersen became Master of Metropolis only after *taking* Hel from Rotwang. Hence, Rotwang represents a Lucifer spirit from the Pleroma, who, coming from a foreign land "in the track" of his predecessor—the red-shoed magician from the East (i.e. the direction of the *rising sun*)—resides in a structure far older than Fredersen's realm, Hel, and even the town itself.<sup>675</sup>

In this sense, Hel contains the proverbial "true light" Rotwang has "lost" to Fredersen.

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<sup>673</sup> Freder's desires to return to his mother are overtly reminiscent of Cancer, and his love for Hel contrasts with Rotwang's in such a way that leads to their inevitable conflict with one another over Maria. Whereas Freder expresses childlike devotion to her as his mother and longs for her nurture and care, Rotwang is driven by calloused passion and wishes only to possess her.

<sup>674</sup> Von Harbou herself had already employed this trope in *Der müde Tod*, in which the young woman propels the plotline and becomes the motivation for the chief characters. As Elsaesser indicates, this also occurs with Mina in *Nosferatu* and Jane in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, who compel the protagonists to heroism and their antagonists to crime. And yet, much like Hel, these heroines are secretly in league with the antagonist (Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After* 85).

<sup>675</sup> For the account of how Fredersen took Hel from Rotwang, see von Harbou, *Metropolis* 62-63.

Doubly representing Sophia, the Gnostic vessel of creative life force, Hel is the moon-mother of all three main characters, indeed all the people, in Lang and von Harbou's story. It is she who is the numinous namesake behind Fredersen's Metropolis, the "mother city" fallen from grace.

That Hel represents the planetary ruler of Cancer<sup>676</sup> is all the more appropriate in light of the overtly Semitic Rotwang's devotion to her, especially since in classical astrology the moon was eminently associated with the Jewish nation Israel.<sup>677</sup> For this reason, it should be no surprise Rotwang exhausts his talents to bring Hel back to himself in his latest invention, the Machine Man. While in the novel Fredersen commissions the creation of the Machine Man as a replacement for his workers, in the film Rotwang creates the robot seemingly in order to revive Hel; in both cases, the Machine Man represents Lucifer-Demiurge's vain attempt to create an adequate vessel for the life-giving power from his mother. Thus the technologically savvy Rotwang epitomizes another Cancerian pitfall: just at the point of maximum opportunity to press forward and achieve new goals, he scuttles away into false securities of the past like the proverbial crustacean.<sup>678</sup> As he exclaims when showing off the robot: "For me she has not died, Joh Fredersen – *for me, she lives – –!*"<sup>679</sup> and later with, "The woman [i.e. the robot] is *mine*,

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<sup>676</sup> In her novel for *Metropolis*, von Harbou made numerous, almost subliminal connections linking Hel with silver, the metal alchemically associated with the moon. During the novel's scene that corresponds exactly to the filmic scene on Cancer, Rotwang exclaims to Fredersen: „Vergessen? Ich habe zweimal im Leben etwas vergessen... einmal, daß Ätro-öl und Quicksilber eine Idiosynkrasie gegeneinander haben; das loste mich den Arm. Zweitens, daß Hel ein Weib war und du ein Mann; das loste mich mein Herz. Das dritte Mal, fürchte ich, würde es den Kopf kosten. Ich werde nie mehr etwas vergessen, Joh Fredersen!“ (63). Earlier, when Freder wanders the streets of Metropolis and cries out to the Virgin Mary holding a sickle and a moon (associated with Virgo and Cancer, respectively) atop the cathedral, von Harbou's prose spends almost an entire paragraph beforehand explaining how the bell (a feminine object) beneath the Virgin was formed from two types of silver: „Es hieß, der Meister, die sie gegossen hatte, wäre um ihretwillen zum Schelm geworden, denn er stahl wie ein Rabe geweihtes und ungeweihtes Silber und goß es der Glocke in den metallenen Leib. Als Lohn seiner Tat unter dem Rad der Schmerzen.“ (22).

<sup>677</sup> The moon's astrological association with the Jews was due to multiple reasons. For obvious reasons, the Jewish calendar was based on twenty-eight-day lunar cycles.

<sup>678</sup> See Pagan 54-56.

<sup>679</sup> Original: „Mir ist sie nicht gestorben, Joh Fredersen, – mir lebt sie – –!“

Joh Fredersen! The son of Hel remains yours!”<sup>680</sup> Not only does Rotwang’s lifestyle exhibit a thoroughly Cancerian nature, the products of his labors do as well. The Machine Man, the Paternoster Machine, or the M-Machine, and all his other technologies for Metropolis “live” betwixt medieval (past) and modern (present) science.

If dubious alchemy, capitalist technocracy, and lunatic devotion (pun intended) to Hel brand Rotwang with all the contradictions pervading Jewish stereotypes, then so does the inventor’s reverent treatment of the singular object embodying all three of these racially charged earmarks, the Machine Man. Much like his statue of Hel on the floor below his laboratory, the reclusive genius keeps the robot concealed behind a curtain, seated like a metallic idol on a streamline stage. This shrine—specifically, the inverted pentagram under which the robot is enthroned—deserves special attention in order to understand the occult subtext in this and subsequent scenes of *Metropolis*. In her book, von Harbou repeatedly referenced this symbol as “the Seal of Solomon, the pentagram” a name commonly given to either the pentagram or hexagram in occult treatises.<sup>681</sup> When specified as a pentagram, the Seal of Solomon refers specifically to the magical pentagram described in Kabbalistic and alchemical lore by which Solomon conjured demons in order to set the foundation for the First Temple of Judaism.<sup>682</sup> Capturing the

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<sup>680</sup> Original: „Mein ist die Frau, Joh Fredersen! Dir blieb der Sohn der Hell!“

<sup>681</sup> Technically, the five-pointed star in Lang’s film is a pentalpha, distinguished by its five lines whose form ten interlocking intersections. While the lines of a pentagram meld together, the lines of a pentalpha overlap. Despite this difference in their formations, however, these five-sided star-shaped signs do not vary in symbology. See the *Testament of Solomon*.

<sup>682</sup> Though calling the pentagram the “Key of Solomon,” Eliphas Levi wrote a chapter discussing its significance in Kabbala, alchemy, and Goethe’s *Faust* (Vol. I 24–28). He also associated it with the “Great Work” of alchemy, saying: When the masters in alchemy say that little time and money are needed to accomplish the works of science, above all when they affirm that one vessel is alone needed, when they speak of the great and unique Athanor which all can use, which is ready to each man’s hand, which all possess without knowing it, they allude to philosophical and moral alchemy. As a fact, the strong and resolute will can arrive in a short time at absolute independence, and we are all in possession of the chemical instrument, the great and sole Athanor which answers for the separation of the subtle from the gross and the fixed from the volatile. This instrument, complete as the world and precise as mathematics, is represented by the sages under the emblem of the Pentagram or five-pointed star, which is the absolute sign of human intelligence” (*ibid.* 59). As Rotwang’s own “Great Work,” the Machine Man sits appropriately below the pentagram.

Machine Man behind the curtain, Lang and von Harbou devised a *mis-en-scéne* to function as Rotwang's private Holy of Holies in which the automaton—itself a sacrificial work, having cost him his hand—becomes his Mercy Seat for Hel (Fig. 18).

Once again, for Rotwang the limits between science and religion, experiment and sacrament, are, like his goals, never clearly distinguishable. By repeatedly mentioning in her novel that a “Seal of Solomon” hung above the Machine Man as well as upon every door in Rotwang’s laboratory-house, von Harbou inspired her husband to implement these unignorable visuals in his portrayal of the medieval structure filled with its advanced technologies. Contrasted with the hand-sized pentagrams on the *doors* throughout Rotwang’s abode, the forlorn placement of the giant pentagram above the Machine Man stands as Lang and von Harbou’s joint effort to make ostensibly obvious what in mystical treatises like the ancient *Testament of Solomon* make painfully clear: the pentagram itself is an occult threshold by whose animistic power Rotwang channels the Machine Man with life force.

By its technological virtue to reach into psychic planes of existence, this symbol likewise becomes an oblique reference to Cancer, whose solstitial status marked the sign as a cosmic “gate” of incarnation. This bicorporal sign corresponds the annual gate through which spirits *descended* onto earth. (Conversely—and discussed in detail below in Cycle 9 of Lang’s filmic, where an upright pentagram comes into play—it was held that Capricorn marked the gate through which spirits *ascended* into heaven.)<sup>683</sup> In this

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<sup>683</sup> Bailey wrote extensively on the cosmic gates of Cancer and Capricorn. In describing its esoteric significance in Cancer, Bailey wrote that this gate “is allied with material nature, and with the mother of forms, just as the other gate, Capricorn, is allied with spirit, the father of all that IS” (312-313). The maternal becoming the material encapsulates exactly how Rotwang intends to utilize his Seal of Solomon. See also: “It is the focused energy of Cancer which makes it a major magnetic or attractive focal point leading to the processes of incarnation. Through the door of Cancer streams the ‘magnetic magical light which guides the soul into the dark place of experience’” (336).

Cancerian cycle, the pentagram is appropriately inverted in order to emphasize the downward channeling of spirit into matter. In this particular scene where the automaton slowly rises to greet and chill Fredersen, then, the pentagram behind the Machine Man indicates an oppositional psychic force conjured by Rotwang, its inventor and idolater. Faithful to the alchemical symbolism of the pentagram and the astrological descending gate at Cancer, von Harbou thus depicted the Machine Man as a demonic “condensation” of sexual and technological spirit.<sup>684</sup> The Faustian pentagram’s Cancerian implications set an uncanny tone to Freder’s own “condensation” into the Machine Halls during the previous cycle, as well as his toil at the Paternoster Machine in the present cycle, briefly shown when Rotwang pushes Fredersen away from his surrogate lover, terminating the cycle with his disparaging: “The son of Hel is yours!”

#### THE PRIMACY OF ALLEGORY

Only a more extensive study can reveal the faithfulness to the zodiac which Lang and von Harbou exhibited in their collaboration *Metropolis*. Playfully in tune with the themes of destiny, irredeemability, and the juxtapositioning of technology and mysticism that plague their filmographies, Lang and von Harbou told of the destruction of a vague, futuristic city in order to evoke the eschatology of Gnosticism and the astrological

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<sup>684</sup> The significance of the pentagram in relation to the Machine Man is underscored in R.L. Rutsky’s acknowledgment that “*the false Maria represents the condensation* of a sexuality and a technology whose *demonic or uncanny life is the product of a fetishization* in which a necessarily alienated object (both sexual and technological) takes on the status of, is substituted for, an organic whole” [emphasis added] (Rutsky, “The Mediation of Technology and Gender: *Metropolis*, Nazism, Modernism,” in Bachmann, *Fritz Lang’s Metropolis* 222). While Bachmann makes this observation in his commentary on the vision/dance scene (i.e., at the cusp of Capricorn—the elliptical opposite of Cancer), this psychosexual fetishization of the Machine Man is already prefigured in the Cancer section of the film, when Rotwang presents Fredersen with his new creation as a living substitute for the departed Hel. With or without Maria’s image, the Machine Man stands as a condensation, an embodiment, of Rotwang’s compensation for his failure as an alchemist and as a man—viz. to devise a technological life form, and to bring back his departed love. [FOR SCORPIO SECTION: Whatever its occult source and despite its inventor’s wishful thinking, this entity is *not* Hel, for it is a creation and cannot itself create life. The living force Rotwang has ‘programmed’ into the robot in order to obstruct the young technocrat’s mission. Like its “inventor,” the Machine Man becomes a parasite whose productions are tasteless, derivative, and sadistic, never artless, original, or altruistic.]

associations associated with its groping desire to transcend the mundane world of pain, alienation, and illusion concealing the true nature and inner workings of the universe.

More than a mere commentary on the social, political, or economic situation of Germany in the early 1920s, von Harbou and Lang hearkened to a deeper, far more personal aspect of the human condition in the language of allegory. As Hartmann had made clear: “Fictions are necessary to represent truths; but they should not be mistaken for the truth itself. The truth is eternal, and cannot be grasped by that which is neither eternal nor true. We need fictions to bring it within our grasp as long as we have ourselves merely a fictitious existence.”<sup>685</sup>

Like many of her works, however, von Harbou’s thesis was not entirely original. She seems to have ultimately derived the zodiacal structure behind her narrative from Hans Brennert and Fridel Köhne in *Algol*, which also exudes with Gnostic overtones. By imbuing their screenplays for *Algol* and *Metropolis* with wordplay, Fridel Köhne, Hans Brennert, and Thea von Harbou put a high priority on semantics and language. From the names of their characters, to the dialogue, to the descriptive intertitles, the scripts for these two films teem with symbolic wordplay. Knowledgeable of the cultural hype concerning the revival of ancient Gnosticism and its ramifications for modern identity, these three screenwriters imbued their screenplays with two unique yet similar Gnostic subtexts that tell of the inner illumination of the human psyche. As we have seen, modern Gnostics understood that the written word was essential for their predecessors in order to convey spiritual knowledge that eluded descriptive words themselves.

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<sup>685</sup> Hartmann, *Magic: White and Black* 28.



Diagram 5.1: The zodiacal outline of Mark's Gospel from Erbt's *Jesus* 39. Specifically, this diagram examines the overarching themes for each house of the zodiacal outline of Mark as well as the association of the signs with the twelve apostles.

Chart 5.2: The Zodiacal Schema in Three Weimar Fantasy Films

| Signs & Decans      | Zodiacal Associations, Characteristics, & Themes   | <i>Algol: Eine Tragödie der Macht</i> (1920)  | <i>Die Nibelungen: Siegfrieds Tod</i> (1924)  | <i>Metropolis</i> (1927)  |
|---------------------|--|---|---|---|
| Aries ( $\varpi$ )  | Vernal Equinox<br>Initiation<br>Action<br>Assertiveness<br>Impulsiveness<br>New beginnings<br>Rugged valor | Leonore hosts her jubilant <i>Gartenfest</i> for the coalmine workers in “sun and light” to celebrate her ascension.<br>Robert curses her good intentions. At night, Robert is ‘initiated’ by Algol into the secrets of the Algol Machine.    | Departing from his tutor Meme in the fantastic world of the <i>Nibelungen</i> , Siegfried learns of Kriemhild, the princess at Worms, and journeys there to win her hand in marriage.   | After his vision of Maria in the Eternal Gardens, Freder abandons his caretakers for the Machine Halls in order to learn more about the maiden.           |
| Taurus ( $\delta$ ) | Accumulation<br>Light<br>Materialism<br>Production<br>Wealth and riches<br>Worldliness                     | Within a year, the economy surges as Robert, suddenly a prosperous engineer, opens his Bios-Works.  | Having slain the dragon, Siegfried wanders into the Odenwald, where Alberich (Fafner) offers the youth the Nibelungen treasure.   | After discovering “Moloch,” Freder visits his industrious father, Joh Fredersen, the “Master of Metropolis.”  |
| Gemini ( $\Pi$ )    | Duality<br>Efforts to communicate<br>Indecision<br>Journeys<br>Sibling relationships                       | Peter Hell, Maria and Robert’s friend, returns from <i>Wanderschaft</i> . The Bios-Works puts Leonore’s coalmines in jeopardy, leading her workers to riot. Calling on his “brothers and sisters,” Robert calms the workers and weds Leonore. | In the guise of a king with twelve vassals, Siegfried enters the court at Worms and asks for Kriemhild’s hand. Her brother, King Gunther, stipulates that he must first help him win Brunhild for himself. The two travel to her palace in Iceland. | Descending to the depths, Freder switches lives with Georgi, his “brother,” who betrays his liberator and succumbs to the nightly pleasures at Yoshiwara. |
| Cancer ( $\Xi$ )    | Summer Solstice<br>Clannishness<br>Heritage and tradition<br>Nourishment<br>Protection<br>Vacillation      | Twenty years later, Robert’s nation celebrates his power. Having moved to an agrarian society, Maria is shown as the widowed mother to  | Offended by the outsiders’ encroachment, Brunhild challenges the Gunther to three feats of strength. Wearing his invisibility   | Rotwang and Fredersen discuss the departed Hel, ‘mother of Metropolis.’ Fredersen vacillates about the com-   |

|                       |                                     |   |  |  |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|---|--|--|
|                       |                                     | Peter Hell, II.   | veil acquired from Alberich, Freder aids the uncertain king.   | pletion of the Machine Man.  |
| Leo ( <b>♌</b> )      | Aggrandizement<br>“Divine Splendor” | Celebrated as “Ruler ( <i>Herr</i> ) of the World,” Robert elects twelve administrators to oversee the expanded Bios-Works, including his son Reginald.   | Wearing his invisibility veil from Fafner, Siegfried aids Gunther to victory in all three competitions.  | Freder undergoes his ‘transfiguration’ at the dial machine; then joins workers to find solace in the catacombs.  |
| Hydra                 | Glory                               |   |  |  |
| Corvus                | Kingship                            |   |  |  |
| Crater                | Revelation of identity              |   |  |  |
| Virgo ( <b>♍</b> )    | Children<br>Humility and modesty    | The Herne children become the focus: Reginald lazes about the palace while Magda shows herself useful to her family. Robert continues refusing to share the occult secret to his power.                     | Siegfried agrees to disguise himself as Gunther with the veil in order to force Brunhild into submission; Kriemhild awaits their return to Worms.  | In the catacombs, Freder and the childlike workers listen to a parable of peace from the virginal-motherly Maria.  |
| Bootes                | Pettiness                           |   |  |  |
| Centaurus             | Purity                              |   |  |  |
| Coma                  | Simplicity                          |   |  |  |
| Libra ( <b>♎</b> )    | Autumnal Equinox<br>Balance         | The government of Maria’s country signs a contract with the Bios-Works, whose new factory employs young men in the agrarian state, including Peter. The seductress Yella Ward deters Reginald from working. | A joint marriage is performed for Siegfried and Gunther at the cathedral. The two men also vow themselves as blood brothers, pledging to oversee the security of Burgundy.   | Having joined together, Freder and Maria plan to meet at the cathedral to discuss resistance; Slim captures Georgi and Josphat, sending both to the Machine Halls. |
| The Cross             | Cooperation                         |   |  |  |
| The Crown             | Marriage contracts                  |   |  |  |
| Victim of the Centaur | Partnerships<br>Reciprocity         |   |  |  |
| Scorpio ( <b>♏</b> )  | “Bringer of Death”                  | Because Yella denied his request until he inherited his father’s company, Reginald holds a coup against Robert.   | Siegfried confides in Brunhild about his veil, her brother’s failure to defeat Brunhild, etc.; Siegfried’s incoming treasure reinvigorates the waning kingdom; Kriemhild reveals the truth about the veil to Brunhild. | After ‘raping’ Maria in the catacombs, Rotwang transposes Maria’s image onto the Machine Man during a clandestine experiment in his laboratory.                    |
| Hercules              | Hidden powers                       |   |  |  |
| Orphiuchus            | Conspiracy                          |   |  |  |
| The Serpent           | Regeneration                        |   |  |  |
|                       | Sexual powers                       |   |  |  |
|                       | Transformation                      |   |  |  |

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 Algol rays.

|                    |  |  |  |   |
|--------------------|--|--|--|---|
| Sagittarius<br>(♐) | Recklessness<br>Religiosity<br>Revelry<br>Spiritual trials | After a riot, Peter journeys to Robert to demand he grant “the power to the people.” Hoping not to upset his bourgeois party guests, Robert demands the worker don a white suit. Peter rages out of the party with Magda in protest. | The jealous Brunhild lies to Gunther that Siegfried raped her the night he wore his veil. Gunther conspires with Hagen to kill Siegfried at a hunt. Kriemhild has foreboding dreams about Siegfried’s death. | Freder is tested psychically by the Machine Man, which dances for the elites at Rotwang’s soiree. Slim appears to Freder as a monk preaching of the Apocalypse.             |
| Capricorn<br>(♑)   | Winter Equinox<br>Callousness<br>Death of the hero         | As Peter and Magda escape “Herne Land” to Maria, the Reginald succeeds in his coup.  | During the hunt, Hagen kills Siegfried from behind with a spear. Concealing his knowledge from the hero, Gunther shies away from any direct involvement.   | The bedridden Freder ‘dies’ and is ‘reborn’ after his telepathic experience, descending again into the catacombs. Riled by the Machine Man, the workers叛 against Fredersen. |
| Aquilla            | Pretense   |  |  |   |
| Delphinus          | Challenges to authority                                    |  |  |   |
| Sagitta            | Responsibility   |  |  |   |
| Aquarius<br>(♒)    | Anarchy<br>Aspirations for future<br>Cleansing processes   | Robert Herne labors in the coalmines, as Maria brings him drinking water.  | Upon their return, Kriemhild’s brothers betray her in her defamation of Hagen, prompting her avowal to avenge Siegfried’s death.   | While the elites revel at Yoshiwara, the workers revolt in the Machine Halls; during the meltdown, a great flood in the Workers’ City ensues.                               |
| Cygnus             |  |  |  |   |
| Pegasus            | Cosmopolitan ideas   |  |  |   |
| The Southern Fish  | Progress   |  |  |   |
| Pisces (♓)         | Atonement by suffering<br>Compassion                       | Approaching the foreman with a lamp, Algol claims to be Robert’s newly appointed assistant. Robert and Maria invite Algol to live with them.   | Brunhild commits suicide before Siegfried’s corpse at the cathedral. Kriemhild prays before her late husband’s body, swearing to avenge his death.   | Freder kills Rotwang; the “Heart” unites “Head” and “Hands.” Workers suffer in the Machine Halls (at beginning).  |
| The Band           | Deception  |  |  |   |
| Cepheus            | Self-sacrifice   |  |  |   |
| Andromeda          | Self-undoing   |  |  |   |

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Fig. 5.1: Explaining the common ancient portrayal of the zodiacal constellations across the globe's elliptic, Niemojewski alluded to the myth of the defeated Atlas, condemned to bear the planet on his shoulders....<sup>686</sup>

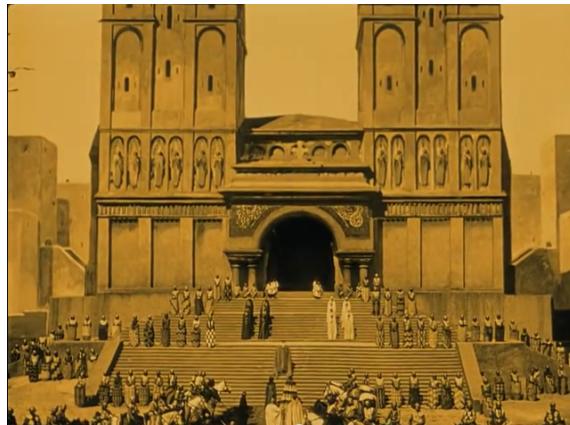


Fig. 5.3: As though to emphasize the transition into the narrative section on Libra, Lang and von Harbou opened the marriage scene in *Siegfried* with a slowly expanding iris encompassing the arched entrance of the church, an allusion to the glyph of the mythic scales ( $\text{♎}$ ) as well as the sign's association with marriage contracts and partnerships.

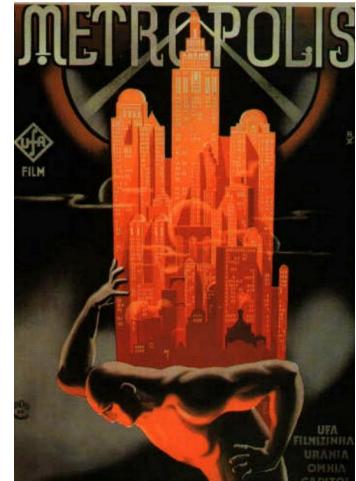


Fig. 5.2: ...No different is the fate of the workers in *Metropolis*, as this poster makes clear. They, like the other characters in the film, are guided by subliminal plays on ancient astral myths which von Harbou and Lang stitched together in order to produce the plot for their science fiction fantasy.



Fig. 5.4: Immediately following Brunhild's emphatic command, "Kill Siegfried!", this otherwise insignificant image issues in the narrative cycle on the sign of Sagittarius ( $\text{♐}$ ). Here, the ill-fated hero assuming the pose of the zodiacal glyph: the archer.<sup>687</sup>

<sup>686</sup> Niemojewski, *Astral Geheimnisse* 35.

<sup>687</sup> Original: „Töte Siegfried!“



Fig. 5.5: Withdrawn from the rest of Metropolis, the reclusive Rotwang is, much like the Crab of Cancer, a walking contradiction. By capturing the inventor in this position, Lang introduced his audience to the cycle of his film based on the themes of this particular constellation (♋).



Fig. 5.6: Though initially envisioned briefly in the Aries cycle, Maria is fully introduced into von Harbou's plot upon the Virgo cycle, in which Freder and other workers find salvific comfort in her presence. Not only does her hieratic gesture and veil suggest Madonna iconography, the fourteen candles behind her and their forming a *vesica pisces* suggests her role as Virgo (♍).

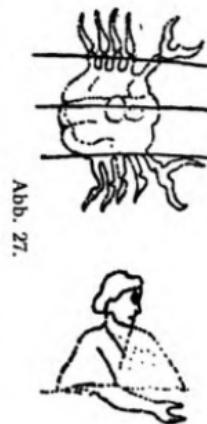


Fig. 5.7: Demonstrating pictorially the textual assertions of the Pan-Babylonians, Niemojewski argued the popular concept of Jesus and His twelve disciples, he asserted, mimicked the “funerary meal” (*Totenmahl*) style popular ancient Rome art, which typically depicted anthropomorphized constellations (i.e. gods) sitting in relation to one another as seen at particular seasons in the night sky. In this visual deconstruction of a catacomb fresco portraying the Last Supper, Niemojewski highlighted the astrological significance for St. Andrew.<sup>688</sup>



Fig. 5.8: Above is one of Niemojewski's sketches of a catacomb fresco. Featuring similar images, he emphasized the importance of the *vesica pisces* (the almond-shaped nimbus), which, distinctly associated with Marian iconography, represented the Gnostic “mystic egg,” which for the seeker signified the salvific womb of the universe.<sup>689</sup>

<sup>688</sup> See Niemojewski, *Astral Geheimnisse* 37.

<sup>689</sup> See Niemojewski, *Astral Geheimnisse* 83; see 84-85 regarding the significance of number fourteen with Isis and Osiris and the mythical implications regarding Jesus and Mary.



Fig. 5.9: As Freder's white car streaks across a suspended bridge, activating light beams on its way to his father's office at the New Tower of Babel, Lang's visuals are redolent of the Greek myth of Bellerophon. Lang's allusion was perfectly placed within his filmic narrative, since this sequence—like the constellation for Bellerophon, the Charioteer—signifies a decan in the celestial realm of Taurus.



Fig. 5.10: In this 1924 poster for Part One of Lang and von Harbou's *Die Nibelungen*, Siegfried and his twelve knights appear implicitly as the solar hero followed by the constellations of the zodiac. Such an understanding of the Siegfried mythos was regularly discussed among the Pan-Babylonians and the mystics of the *fin de siècle*.



Fig. 5.11: “Freder –! Freder –!” In the Eternal Gardens, the courtesan attracts the hero’s attention through the cascades of the fountain. With cinematic precision Lang transposed her gleeful gesture with the water and fountain in order to mimic the horns of the ram in glyph of Aries (♈).



Fig. 5.12: Stroking her hair with an invigorated smile, the mermaid’s reclining pose not only reaffirms Lang and von Harbou’s suggestion of the arches of Aries, the rejuvenating powers as the Fountain of Youth. The nymph-like statue recalls the decan Cassiopeia, mythologized for her beauty and vanity alike.



Fig. 5.13: Lang captured the spatial focus for each oncoming astrological cycle with an establishing shot. Here, abstracted above the city, is the glyph of Taurus (♉), signifying Freder's destination as he flees from Moloch in the Machine Halls. Even the small computer hanging on the wall of Fredersen's sky-high office resembles a bull's face.



Fig. 5.14: Evoking the pose of Orion with one foot over the celestial river Eridanus, Fredersen's mighty stance atop his tower is appropriate when his son asks him why the workers have gone to the depths. As the Master of Metropolis answers—maintaining his pose for two minutes—a montage comes over the screen of downtrodden workers in a descending elevator.<sup>690</sup>



Fig. 5.15: Upon adjusting his eyes in the Machine Halls, Freder looks directly in front of him to find this machine, called the Paternoster Machine in the novel. At its center stands Worker 11811 (Georgi), the anonymous worker he will approach merely as “brother.” Lang and von Harbou scripted Freder to approach Georgi from this angle for a reason: the metal frame of the Paternoster Machine outlines precisely the glyph of Gemini (♊).



Fig. 5.16: Faithfully rendering Freder and Georgi as the futuristic counterparts to Castor and Pollux, Lang captured the actors respective to one another in accordance with the constellational tradition concerning the Twins of Gemini.

<sup>690</sup> “From beneath the down-coming foot of Orion, from under the feet of the rampant aurochs, and from before both, there flows out a great tortuous river [...] down into the regions of darkness in the underworld.” Seiss 273-274. See also Drews, *Der Markusevangelium* 195.



Fig. 5.17: Unbeknownst to Rotwang, Fredersen stumbles upon his old rival's statue of Hel, the allegorical mother of Metropolis.



Fig. 5.18: Behind another curtain, Rotwang reveals to Fredersen the Machine-Man, the inventor's surrogate for the lost Hel. Much like the perverted “false light” of the Demiurge, Fredersen later uses the Machine-Man to subjugate the inhabitants of Metropolis by twisting the salvific persona of Maria and thus induce them to commit the Seven Deadly Sins.

## CONCLUSION LAST THINGS

When considering the future of cinema in 1926, Lang maintained:

Fundamental revolutions in painting, sculpture, architecture, and music speak eloquently of the fact that people of today are seeking and finding their own means of lending artistic form to their sentiments. Film has an advantage over all other expressive forms: its freedom from space, time, and place. What makes it richer than others is its natural expressiveness inherent in its formal means. I maintain that film has barely risen above the first rung on the ladder of its development, and that it will become the more personal, stronger, and more artistic the sooner it renounces all transmitted or borrowed expressive forms and throws itself into the unlimited possibilities of the purely filmic [...].<sup>691</sup>

The apocalyptic imagery and plots in Weimar science fiction cinema are something, therefore, which can be interpreted as an external expression of common historical experiences. But these plots contain allusions to mythic realities that, in Lang's words, are free of space, time, and place, and which, are far more personal than reflections of exoteric events in twentieth-century Germany such as the Great War, the Spartacus Uprising, hyperinflation, the strife between labor and capital, or mass unemployment. This work by no means seeks to disenfranchise previous studies which approach Weimar cinema from a historical perspective—indeed, as this work demonstrates, there is much validity in these assertions—but it is fundamentally essential to consider how contemporary notions of the esoteric influenced the overt occult themes in the identity crises depicted in this proto-genre. Understanding this perspective helps understanding the foundations of science fiction.

In Weimar Germany, technology and science—or at least the popular conceptions of these practices—had as much a central impact on the occult movement as they did on

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<sup>691</sup> Lang's article was published in *Die Literarische Welt* 1 (Oct. 1926). Cited in R. Bruce Elder "Gnostic Lang" in Robert Haller, ed. *Fritz Lang 2000* (New York, NY: Anthology Film Archives, 2000): 48-49.

German Expressionism. Just as the technical trappings of cinema became the new artistic medium that rekindled the popularity of German Expressionism that was already waning in literature, painting, and theater, so were public experiments, statistical analyses, and even inventions the apparatus that kept alive the enthusiasm for such diverse practices as séances, telepathy, telekinesis, hypnotism, and, not least of all, astrology. For this reason science and technology provided proof not only the saving power already attributed both to themselves as well as arcane spiritual practices, they also, much like cinema for German Expressionism, expanded the cultural appeal of occultism as a more accessible, more individualized, and therefore more egalitarian venue in the market system.

As evidenced by their own works, their colleagues, and the prewar intellectual milieu surrounding the occult sciences, the would-be filmmakers of Weimar science fiction were actively engaged in the study of the ancient Orient, the occult phenomena, and, especially, Gnostic motifs throughout their works. Following in the footsteps of the proponents of the occult movement and leaders of contemporary esoteric schools who linked the ancient and the modern through spiritual practices influenced by the revival of Gnosticism, the filmmakers behind Weimar science fiction film merged the ancient with the modern in their aesthetic appeal to the timelessness of occult powers and the quest for self-knowledge. Not only is this motif in keeping with the fantasy genre, it is faithful to the Gnostic understanding of man's relationship to the cosmos as a transcendental reality through which personal revelation can be received. This assertion does not suggest that all the filmmakers in this study sought to infiltrate the proto-genre of science fiction with esoteric and arcane topics for the same aesthetic or ideological reasons or even with mutual awareness. Instead, as this study has shown, these writers and directors turned to

such topics because the occult and contemporary esoteric school's teachings about such ideas proved a valuable touchstone linking not merely science and technology to the fantastic but also popular conceptions of science and technology widely associated with occult doctrine.

Judging from the content of their films and their personal lives, the cultural and intellectual influences evoke the changing image of the Orient during the early twentieth century. Naturally, this upheaval influenced the outlook of esoteric schools and occult societies throughout Europe as well the mystical approach to Western spirituality. As the archaeological, anthropological, and ideological controversies before the Great War implied, the demarcations between cultural and intellectual became almost as muddled as the lines between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. If groundbreaking research in classical philology could inflate classical modernism as it pertained to Greece, Rome, and the Christian heritage, then oriental philology could knock this cosmology down by appealing to even more rigorous standards of self-proclaimed objectivity. Nineteenth-century platitudes that once invoked oriental stagnation became increasingly challenged by more recent and well-established admirers of the resilient East as against the constant revolutions of fortune in the West. In spite of some misgivings, German-speaking culture followed suit. While the Greeks once stood for youth, now a primitivist aesthetic, the robust orientalist scholarship, and the critique of Western decay—so indicative of the *fin-de-siècle* angst—made the Orient seem more authentically and enviably youthful.<sup>692</sup> The cultural shift of this intellectual movement was especially obvious in Germany, and

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<sup>692</sup> Suzanne Marchand, "German Orientalism and the Decline of the West," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 145, 4 (Dec. 2001): 472.

would take on new meaning in the grim aftermath of the Great War.<sup>693</sup>

In the shadow of national defeat, individual Germans suffered both physically and psychically. The undying presence of traumatic memories, psychological disorders, and maimed bodies panged an existential crisis that for young and old would linger a lifetime. More than a mass experience, the war and its post-apocalyptic environment were personal. There is no doubt that this barbaric chaos made the average German question the longevity, redeemability, and dependability of his own identity. In 1927, this article by Oscar A.H. Schmitz—the brother-in-law of Alfred Kubin—in the bourgeois *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* offered reassurance:

Everyone is asking themselves: Who am I? What is a self in general? A bare illusion of my material brain that will [eventually] vanish [...] or something transcendent that although embodied in matter [...] has its true basis elsewhere? The heart flees from the despair of the first answer to the consolation of the second. [...] That is why the churches are being filled once again. [...] Such emergency religion is of course often only an illusion that overlooks facts and proof. What distinguishes each new trend that leaves materialism behind, however, is the attempt to find new meaning that [...] offers the same path to salvation as religion, without coming into conflict with detailed scientific findings that must be accepted by modern men and women. [...] This is what all modern spiritual tendencies tend towards, including also astrology.<sup>694</sup>

For contemporaries, Schmitz's advertisement for horoscopes captured a dialectic characteristic of the postwar questions of identity. Its pithy phrase, “Everyone is asking themselves: Who am I?,” appealed simultaneously to mass culture on the one hand (*everyone* is asking themselves), and the individual seeking consciousness on the other

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<sup>693</sup> Even their fictitious characters suggest a parallel with this upheaval. Professor ten Brinken, for example, who shatters prevailing conceptions of the past through his mastery of biochemistry and the mandrake legend, mirrors the endeavors of real-life scholars who, aided by a mutual reliance on historical knowledge, used their expertise in philology and archaeology to subvert the standard conception of human civilization immemorial. By rooting itself in the study of antiquity, this new breed of scholars distanced itself from previous generations by deriving evidence from recently discovered manuscripts and excavations from the Near and Far East, concluding that the heritage of the modern West, contrary to Eurocentric presumptions, lay not in the Judeo-Christian tradition, Greece, or Rome, but in the most distant regions of the ancient Orient—Babylon, Persia, India, and China.

<sup>694</sup> Cited in Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore, MA: John Hopkins University Press, 2004): 133-134, n. 8 306.

hand (who am I).<sup>695</sup> And yet another, still more devilish dialectic resonated in the article's professed reconciliation of objective science with something altogether individual and subjective: self-knowledge.

The above article's harmonizing of the objective and the subjective within occult science implies a particular kind of self-knowledge, namely Gnosticism. Though perhaps not all Germans reading this article in 1927 would have linked its suggested correlation of astrology and Gnosticism, during the early twentieth century the popular association between the study of the stars and self-knowledge was widely known to have originated in a Gnostic thought. The correlation of astrology and Gnosticism was hardly new to the modern occult movement. Since the late nineteenth century in particular, that astrological practices provided structure and guidance in the Gnostic discipline had been widely observed by scholars, mystics, and laity alike.<sup>696</sup> By the beginning of the Great War, moreover, that the mechanics of astrology could be manipulated in order to increase self-knowledge teemed in the public's penchant to Gnosticism—or at least esoteric ideologies such as Theosophy, Anthroposophy, and, increasingly, societies like Fraternitas Saturni, all inspired by ancient Gnostic spirituality.<sup>697</sup>

While more research must investigate more thoroughly the extent of this consciousness among members of Ordo Templi Orientis, the Anthroposophical Society,

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<sup>695</sup> Observation from Treitel 134. No doubt this article also drove at the seemingly absurdity of life that still lingered on after the loss of the Great War. The trauma as well as the irredeemable qualities of oneself had been unleashed not simply during combat but especially after the return home. Treitel further suggests that throughout the Weimar years, the physical and, even more so, psychical manifestations of amputation, shell shock, and severe mental disorders had become an ever-present facet of daily life.

<sup>696</sup> For the context of the culmination of the intellectual and cultural strands of occult practices into the postwar era in Germany, see esp. Part II of Treitel's book.

<sup>697</sup> From its founding in New York in 1875, the worldwide Theosophical Society explicitly linked its purpose with Gnosticism. Similarly, with their racial theories postulating the dominance of the Aryan race, Ariosophists claimed that only humans descended from the Teutonic bloodline could most fully ascertain the mysteries of the cosmos. Kirsten J. Grimstad, *The Modern Revival of Gnosticism and Thomas Mann's Doktor Faustus* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2002): 22-23.

Fraternitas Saturni, and other occult orders in German-speaking Europe, it can be reasonably inferred that teachings of Gnosticism did not remain the preserve of scholars even beginning in 1900. The revival of Gnosticism rekindled occult sympathies that had been stirring in Europe for almost three decades, blurring the lines between intellectual and spiritual interests that, in keeping with the Gnostic ideology, seemed somehow appropriate. But scholars during the *fin de siècle* were not as ‘disenchanted’ in their views about Gnosticism as many of them wanted to believe.

In Germany as the rest of the industrialized West, the 1920s became an era of self-development. Why the modern occult program proved so successful had as much to do with Germans’ faith in the saving power of science as their despair over the nation’s spiritual affliction. With its subtle attention to the human experience and its permeation of the consumer market, the modern occult movement easily adapted itself to this mass quest after private truth. For this reason, self-help treatises on astrology boomed during the postwar era. But just as scholars abhorred the social progressivism of nineteenth-century Theosophists, so did these established adherents in the modern occult movement disapprove of this esotericism centered solely on the individual’s worldview instead of his function within the world. At the same time, many Germans saw no sense in ditching metaphysics just because modernity had seemingly threatened religion with cutting-edge research. Instead, these Germans used the new evidence to amend their spirituality.

Into the Weimar era, Gnostic-inspired circles and mystics studied these newfound ancient writings in order to affirm their long-held assertion that occult practices were not merely alternative spiritual venues but indeed superior to and the origin of a perverse exoteric Western religiosity. While the previous two chapters have focused mainly on

the intellectual and cultural milieu before the founding of the Weimar Republic, the next three chapters will demonstrate how *Algol*, *Wunder der Schöpfung*, *Alraune*, *Metropolis*, and *Frau im Mond* in surprisingly radical ways hearken to aggregate observations and controversial teachings of scholars and mystics in German-speaking Europe throughout the first third of the twentieth century, and how German-speaking Europeans incorporated Gnosticism into philosophical worldviews that were expressly modern and not necessarily tied to the past. Ultimately, they aim to demonstrate the surprisingly strong associations between Gnosticism, the occult, and the popular conception of science and technology in Weimar Germany.

By limiting itself to science fiction film, this study has been able to delve deep into the rich heritage that Weimar cinema has given filmmakers almost a century hence. As has often been cited, the five masterpieces in question have gone on to, and continue to, inspire celebrated science fiction movies such as, for instance, James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931), Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), and the Wachowski Brothers' *The Matrix* (2000). Indeed, the most recognizable themes in mainstream science fiction films since the 1920s have remained those first dealt with in Weimar cinema. This is to say nothing of the stunning treasury of visuals inherited from the legacy of silent cinema, one that can only trace its lineage to these five films from Weimar science fiction. For these reasons, if German science fiction film helped form the major paradigms of a cinematic genre, then the strong thematic inspirations that German filmmakers found in astrology and Gnosticism should carry all the greater importance for historical investigation.

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